



**DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

# Cabinet Agenda

5.00 pm

Tuesday, 8 July 2025

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington, DL1 5QT

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

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting.
2. Declarations of Interest.
3. To hear relevant representation (from Members and the General Public) on items on this Cabinet agenda.
4. To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of this Cabinet held on 10 June 2025. (Pages 5 - 10)
5. Matters Referred to Cabinet – There are no matters referred back for reconsideration to this meeting
6. Issues Arising from Scrutiny Committee – There are no issues referred back from the Scrutiny Committees to this Meeting, other than where they have been specifically consulted on an issue and their comments are included in the contents of the relevant report on this agenda.
7. Key Decisions:-
  - (a) Consultation on a Homes Strategy for the Borough – Report of the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection (Pages 11 - 62)
  - (b) Proposed Introduction of an Article 4 Direction To Control The Changes of Use From a Dwelling to a Small House of Multiple Occupation (Between 3-6 Residents) – Report of the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection (Pages 63 - 70)

- (c) Updated Statement of Community Involvement - Part 1 (Local Plan) – Report of the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection (Pages 71 - 84)
8. Climate Change Progress – Report of the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection (Pages 85 - 92)
  9. Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Rent 2024-25 – Report of the Executive Director Resources and Governance (Pages 93 - 102)
  10. Quarter 4 - Council Plan Performance Report – Report of the Chief Officers Executive (Pages 103 - 192)
  11. Disabled Facilities Grant 2025-26 – Executive Director of People (Pages 193 - 212)
  12. Housing Services Fire Safety Policy for Purpose-Built Blocks of Flats, Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation 2025-2030 – Report of the Executive Director Resources and Governance (Pages 213 - 248)
  13. Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Outturn 2024-25 – Report of the Executive Director of Environment , Highways and Community Services and Executive Director of Resources and Governance (Pages 249 - 272)
  14. Revenue Outturn 2024/25 – Report of the Executive of Resources and Governance (Pages 273 - 294)
  15. Xentrall Shared Services Annual Report – Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance (Pages 295 - 304)
  16. Procurement of Development Partner Update – Report of Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection (Pages 305 - 316)
  17. Membership Changes - To consider any Membership Changes to Other Bodies to which Cabinet appoints.
  18. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting.
  19. Questions.

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

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



**PART III            NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

21. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting.
22. Questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Wennington', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**Amy Wennington**  
**Assistant Director Law and Governance**

**Monday, 30 June 2025**

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

**Membership**

Councillors Curry, Garner, Harker, McCollom, McEwan, Porter, Roche and Wallis

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Olivia Hugill, Democratic Officer, Resources and Governance, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. Fridays (e-mail [olivia.hugill@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:olivia.hugill@darlington.gov.uk) or telephone 01325 405363).

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**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE  
MONDAY, 23 JUNE 2025**

**CABINET**  
Tuesday, 10 June 2025

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

**INVITEES** – Councillors Dulston and Snedker.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors Bartch and Mrs. Scott.

**C1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**C2 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON  
ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.**

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

**C3 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON 6TH MAY 2025**

Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Cabinet held on 6 May 2025.

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

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

**C4 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET**

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

**C5 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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

**C6 KEY DECISIONS:-**

**(1) RENEWAL OF THE TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER AND INTRODUCTION  
OF A BOROUGH WIDE PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER**

The Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Environment Highways and Community Services to present the Renewal of the Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) and Introduction of a Borough Wide Public Space Protection Order to Cabinet for approval.

The submitted report explained that the Town Centre PSPO had been in place since 2019 and was last renewed in 2022. The order last for three years, and a review must be undertaken if it is to be renewed. The report states that as part of the renewal process the defined areas of the town centre PSPO covers and some of the wordings of the existing powers are proposed to be amended to improve the effectiveness of the order.

The report highlighted that the proposed new Boroughwide PSPO, which was evidence based had been consulted upon, the additional powers proposed related to begging, the management of side waste and the increasing issues with stray dogs. It was explained that comprehensive training will be provided to Council staff and partners who will use the powers, it was also explained that a application and guidance note had been developed to assist with the proportionate and consistent use of the powers.

Reference was made to whether the stray dogs arrangements within the PSPO covered dogs to be found to be off-lead in restricted areas and whether a fine can be issued.

**RESOLVED** - (a) Approve the renewal of a revised Town Centre PSPO as outlined in this report.

(b) Approve the introduction of a Boroughwide PSPO as outlined in this report.

**REASON** - (a) To provide powers to officers, including Police, PCSOs and Civic Enforcement Officers, to manage various types of anti-social behaviour.

(b)To improve the quality of life of persons visiting and working in the area covered by the PSPO.

**(2) REPRESENTATION ON OTHER BODIES 2025/26**

The Leader introduced the report of the Executive Director of Operations (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Council’s representation on Other Bodies for the 2025/26 Municipal Year to which Cabinet appoints.

**RESOLVED** – That the appointment to other bodies as detailed below, for the 2025/26 Municipal Year, be approved, namely :-

Association of Rail North Partnership Authorities	
Rail North Ltd.	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council) (as named substitute for the TVCAM)
Rail North Committee	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council)
East Coast Mainline Authorities Group	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council)
County Durham and Darlington	Councillor Kane

Foundation Trust – Board of Governors

Creative Darlington	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio) (Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee as named substitute)
Crown Street Library Trustee Board	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council)
Darlington Cares	Councillor Garner (Cabinet Member with Stronger Communities Portfolio)
Darlington Railway Museum Trust	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio)
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio) and Councillor Curry (Cabinet Member with Adults Portfolio)
Darlington Town Centre Deal Board	Councillor Harker (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Garner (Cabinet Member with Stronger Communities Portfolio)
Darlington Young People's Engagement and Justice Service Board	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio) (Councillor Kane as named substitute)
Durham County Pension Fund Committee	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio and Chair of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee)
Family Help Organisation	Councillors Ali, Kane and Ray
Fostering Panel	Councillor Ali
Integrated Care Partnership Tees Valley	Councillor Roche (Chair of Health and Well Being Board) (Councillor Layton as named substitute)
Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve (Associate Member)	Councillor Dillon (Ward Member)
North East Ambulance Service	Councillor Roche (Chair of Health and Well Being Board)
North East Child Poverty Commission	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio)
North East Regional Employers	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Resources

Organisation	Portfolio), Chair of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Vice Chair of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Executive Committee	Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio)
North East Strategic Migration Partnership	Councillor Wallis (Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio), (Councillor Harker, Leader of the Council, as named substitute)
Northern Housing Consortium	Councillor Roche (Cabinet Member with Health and Housing Portfolio)
Northumbrian Regional Flood and Coastal Committee	Councillor Snedker (Councillor Holroyd as named substitute)
Poor Moor Fund/Charity	Councillor McEwan (Cabinet Member with Economy Portfolio)
RELATE North East	Councillor McCollom and Councillor Mahmud
Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Board	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio)
Teesside International Airport Limited - Board	Councillor Garner (to be appointed as Director) (Councillor Haszeldine named substitute Director)
Teesside International Airport Limited - Consultative Committee	Councillor McCollom (Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio)
Tees Valley Local Access Forum	Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee (Chair of Health and Housing Committee as named substitute)

## **C7 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY**

The Cabinet Member with the Health and Housing Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director Environment, Highways and Community Services to update Members of Cabinet on the review of the Darlington's Physical Activity Strategy and to seek approval of a renewed strategy for the period of 2025-2035.

The report explained that the purpose of the Darlington's Physical Activity Strategy was to improve participation and engagement in sport and physical activity.

The report stated that it is one of the key delivery strategies to support the Council Plan and it had been reviewed to align with the objectives with the Council's priorities.

It was highlighted that consultation and engagement had been undertaken to develop the Darlington Physical Activity Strategy 2025-2030, which had been approved by the Darlington

Health and Wellbeing Board on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2024. Reviews of the Strategy will be scheduled alongside the reviews of the Council Plan and any other legislative changes to adjust and realign the content of the strategy if required.

**RESOLVED** - It is recommended that Members approve the renewed strategy for 2025-2035.

**REASON** - The recommendations are supported by the following reason; to ensure the strategy aligns with the Council Plan and provide strategic direction to improve participation and engagement in sports and physical activity.

**C8 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.**

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

**DECISIONS DATED –  
FRIDAY, 13 JUNE 2025**

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**CABINET  
8 JULY 2025**

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## **CONSULTATION ON A HOMES STRATEGY FOR THE BOROUGH**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio  
Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio  
Councillor Jim Garner, Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -  
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To seek members approval to undertake a public consultation on the draft Homes Strategy (**Appendix 1**).

#### **Summary**

2. The draft Homes Strategy 2025 – 2030 provides a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners with regards to housing. The focus of the strategy is providing high quality homes across all tenures, meeting local needs and addressing the borough's housing challenges. It is designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of our approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.
3. The strategy sets a high-level vision, and three key objectives focused around building new homes, improving standards, meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently. The document also contains a number of associated outcomes and actions which we aim to achieve over the next five years (summarised in Appendix 1 of the draft strategy).

#### **Recommendations**

4. It is recommended Members consider the draft Homes Strategy at Appendix 1 and approve the document for public consultation.

#### **Reasons**

5. The recommendation is supported as the Homes Strategy will provide a clear framework for the Council's strategic direction and actions on housing matters.

**Trevor Watson  
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

## Background Papers

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

David Hand: Extension 6294

Council Plan	The strategy supports the core priority of homes that are affordable, secure and meet the current and future needs of residents. There are also a range of indirect benefits for the other priorities of the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	The draft strategy considers inequalities around age and disability. It sets priorities and actions to provide positive impacts on these inequalities in relation to housing provision. This will help to ensure opportunities are accessible to everyone for good housing. It is important to note that the strategy brings together a number of existing Council policies and strategies which have been subject to equality impact assessment.
Tackling Climate Change	Includes measures and actions the Council aims to achieve in terms of housing to mitigate climate change and reduce carbon emissions.
Efficient and effective use of resources	A number of the existing policies and strategies referenced in the document support the efficient and effective use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	High quality homes in the right places supports the health and wellbeing of local residents.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are benefits in reducing levels of crime through several of the priorities in the strategy. For example, encouraging good design and placemaking, urban regeneration and tackling homelessness.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The Homes Strategy will be monitored and reviewed by the planning policy team and other related service areas. There will be no direct impact on the Council's budget. When approved it will form part of the Council's policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Positive impacts with regards to the provision of supported and specialist housing.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

- The Council has a wide variety of roles and responsibilities with regards to housing in the borough. The homes and the places in which people live are vital to our local

communities, influencing overall health and wellbeing. The draft Homes Strategy (appendix 1) provides a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners. The document sets out our strategic direction to maintain and improve the quality of housing to meet local needs and to address the boroughs housing challenges.

7. Given the breadth of the Council's work in housing matters, officers have worked across services areas to produce a draft Homes Strategy. The previous strategy covered the period from 2012 – 2017. Although a number of the key issues remain the same, much has changed since the publication of the previous strategy.
8. The draft strategy sets a high-level vision - to provide high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all. There are also three associated objectives which are set out below and a number of actions which we aim to achieve over the next five years. These actions are summarised in Appendix 1 of the strategy:
  - (a) Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on affordable and social homes, to meet local needs;
  - (b) Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods;
  - (c) Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.
9. The document recognises the importance of a variety of housing matters that the Council is involved in. This includes, delivering new homes, including affordable and social housing, ensuring good placemaking, upgrading existing stock, addressing the needs of specific groups, providing specialist/supported housing and tackling homelessness.
10. Some early engagement was undertaken with the Council's developer's forum (consisting of house builders and registered providers) and a supported living and extra care providers forum. Responses back were however limited, and the intention now is to undertake a wider public consultation on the draft strategy for a period of six weeks.
11. Following the consultation, it is intended that responses will be analysed and changes made to the strategy if required. The final document will be brought back to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet for formal approval.

## **Consultation**

12. Consultation will occur for a six-week period, with internal consultees, external consultees and the wider population.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

13. A further report will be prepared following the end of the consultation and will be brought back to Cabinet with recommendations.

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# **Darlington Borough Council**

## **Homes Strategy 2025 -2030**

### **Foreword**

[By portfolio holder]

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## Executive Summary

The Homes Strategy provides a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners with regards to housing. It provides our strategic direction to maintain and improve the quality of housing to meet local needs and to address the boroughs housing challenges. It is designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of our approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.

The strategy sets an overall vision to provide high quality homes and three key objectives which are set out below. There are also a number of associated priorities and outcomes which we aim to achieve over the next five years (summarised in appendix 1). These have been established utilising a comprehensive evidence base and existing Council policy. They have also been set to address the challenges and opportunities identified.

### Housing Vision

A vision for housing in the borough:

***Providing high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all.***

**Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

**Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

**Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

The strategy recognises the importance of delivering new homes, including affordable, social and new Council owned housing. It is also vital to provide the right infrastructure and community facilities to ensure good placemaking. It is also not just about new housing but upgrading existing stock and ensuring homes are energy efficient, safe and secure.

Residents in Darlington should have fair and equal access to good quality housing that meets their needs. This includes addressing the needs of specific groups including children in and leaving care, people with disability, those with health issues and older people. A range of specialist and supported housing should also be available for those who need it. Through partnership working with other agencies, we also strive to minimise the risk of homelessness and effectively support those who become homeless back to a stable home and an independent life.

High quality homes are vital for our residents and communities, providing indirect benefits for health, the economy and the environment. The Council will aim to strengthen these relationships and achieve the actions and outcomes set out in this document.

## Introduction

The overall aim of the Darlington Homes Strategy is to create positive outcomes and actions for housing related matters in the borough, putting people first and focusing on the housing needs of our residents. The strategy contains a vision to provide high quality homes, three key objectives and a number of associated priorities which are to be achieved over the next five years. These points set out the Council's housing priorities and approach to certain housing issues. The document provides a strategic framework for the actions of the Council and its partners.

A vision for housing in the borough:

***Providing high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all.***

**Objective 1: Building homes with an emphasis social and affordable provision , to meet local needs**

**Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

**Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

Good housing can have indirect benefits to many issues and there are dependencies between them. For example, high quality homes can improve standards of living, improve health, provide a safe community, and enhance education attainment and therefore work prospects. A key link is supporting job opportunities in the borough. This provides more wealth to people and gives access to more housing options. This relationship also works in the other direction. The right type of homes in the right places supports economic growth by attracting investors and new businesses. Providing good quality housing for existing and new residents who are economically active.

Housing and health are also very much interlinked. We know that the homes and the places in which people live is a key determinant of their overall health and wellbeing. High quality homes with access to open space, sustainable transport links and community facilities can encourage healthy lifestyles. Whereas poor accommodation can reaffirm declining health and health inequalities. The Homes Strategy aims to enhance and improve the positive relationships between these issues and matters above.

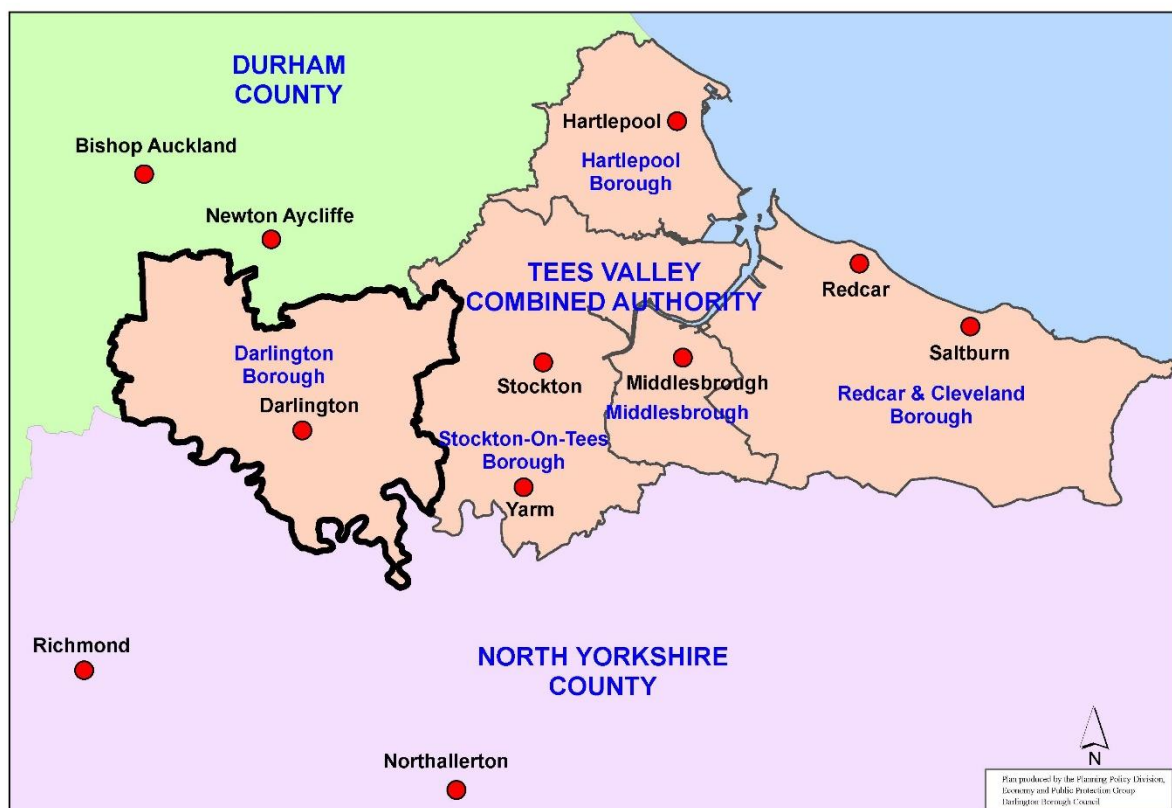


## Darlington Borough Overview

Darlington Borough is a unitary local authority which is situated at the western end of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Area.

### Key Features

- Historic market town, surrounded by open countryside and a number of villages.
- The town's development has been closely associated with the railway age and manufacturing.
- The local economy has performed strongly over recent years, shifting to a more resilient base of specialist engineering, the service sector and public sector employment.
- The borough has excellent local transport links with a well-used public transport network and active travel routes as well as local rail and strategic transport links by rail (East Coast Main Line), road (A1M) and air (Teesside International Airport).
- The town centre provides employment, shops, and services for residents and for parts of North Yorkshire, Durham and Tees Valley.
- Evidence indicates that the borough is generally a self-contained housing market. This is the area in which a substantial majority of the employed population both live and work, and where those moving house choose to stay.



## Demographics

The borough has a growing population. In 2021 it was at approximately 107,800, consisting of 48,900 households. This has increased from 105,560 and 46,670 households in 2011, representing a 2.1% rise in population and a 4.8% rise in households (2011 & 2021 census).

The different components of population change have varied over previous years. However, the general trend in natural change for Darlington since the early 2000s has been more births than deaths. In terms of migration, this tends to vary a lot more but over the same period there has been a general trend of net in migration into the borough.

According to the latest census the trend of the population ageing has continued in England and Wales with more people than ever before in the older age groups. Darlington follows this trend. This has been caused by people living longer and declining birth rates. Approximately 20.5% of the Darlington population is over 65, with 17.1% under 15 years and 62.5% 15 to 64 years. In 2011 the over 65 category was 17.4%, indicating a rise of 3% (2011 and 2021 census).

With more people living longer, household growth will be a key driver of housing need. As people grow older, they tend to live in smaller households, meaning that average household size falls as the population ages. This can be seen in the 2018 household projections which estimate that average household size in Darlington will decrease from 2.2 in 2018 to 2.05 in 2043. This does not necessarily mean that the future need is for smaller housing.

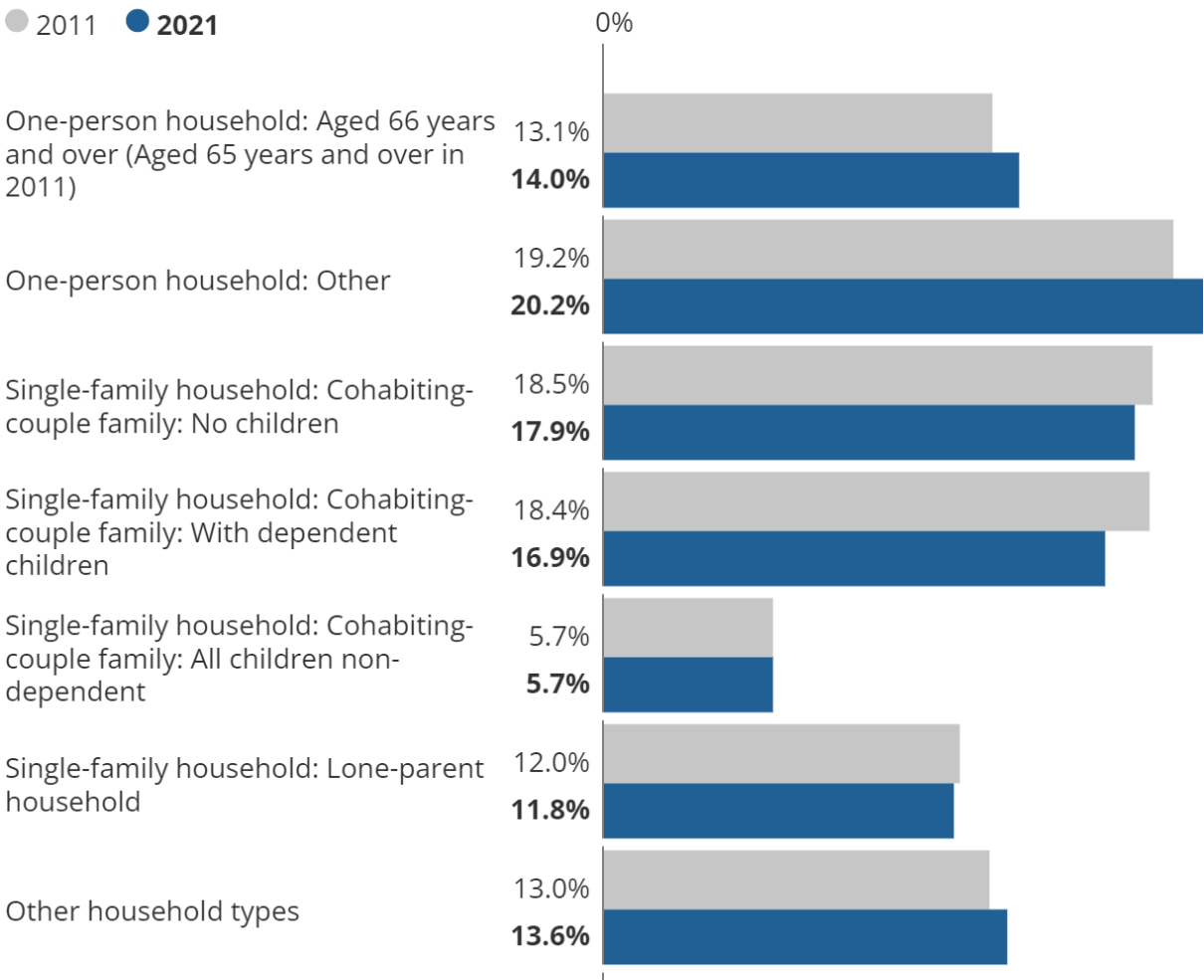
There will be a requirement for some specialist accommodation for older people, however most will wish to remain in their existing homes for as long as possible. This links in with Government social policy to maintain people's independence at home. Household growth will still tend to be driven by younger people such as couples and families who will require largely family homes.

According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation Darlington has become relatively more deprived. Of the 317 Local Authorities in England, Darlington ranked 77th (previously 96th) most deprived based on average score of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Darlington now has 21 LSOAs (previously 16) within the 20% most deprived in England. This increase in relative deprivation is in line with rest of sub-region. There are a number of LSOAs within the 10% least deprived, this indicating a large gap in levels of deprivation across the borough. Overall Darlington remains the least deprived local authority area in Tees Valley.

2021 Census Data

The graphs, tables and bullet points below set out key data from the 2021 census which provides useful context on the population of Darlington and the existing housing stock within the borough. Some changes from the 2011 census are also highlighted.

Percentage of households by household composition, Darlington



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Household composition has remained fairly similar between the 2011 and 2021 census with small increases in the number of one person households and small decreases in single-family households.

<b>Accommodation type in Darlington</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Detached	8209	17.6%	9331	19.1%
Semi-detached	17835	38.3%	19148	39.1%
Terraced	14379	30.9%	13937	28.5%
In a purpose-built block of flats or tenement	5053	10.9%	5271	10.8%
Part of a converted or shared house, including bedsits	778	1.7%	743	1.5%
Part of another converted building, for example, former school, church or warehouse	-	-	172	0.4%
In a commercial building e.g. in an office building or over a shop	268	0.5%	240	0.5%
A caravan or other mobile or temporary structure	30	0.1%	78	0.2%
Total	46552	100%	48920	100%

Accommodation type in Darlington has higher proportions of semi-detached (39.1%) and terraced (28.5%) properties. From the 2011 census the data shows that the proportions have remained relatively similar, with small increases in percentages for detached (1.5%) and semi-detached (0.8%) homes.

<b>Number of bedrooms in households</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 bedroom	4242	9.1%	4269	8.7%
2 bedroom	15645	33.6%	15883	32.5%
3 bedroom	19090	41.0%	19932	40.7%
4 or more bedroom	7590	16.3%	8832	18.1%
Total	46567	100%	48916	100%

The number of bedrooms in households is largely 2 bedroom at 32.5% and 3 bedroom at 40.7%. The proportion of 2 bedroom households has decreased by 1.1% over the last 10 years with the proportion of 4 or more bedroom households increasing by 1.8%.

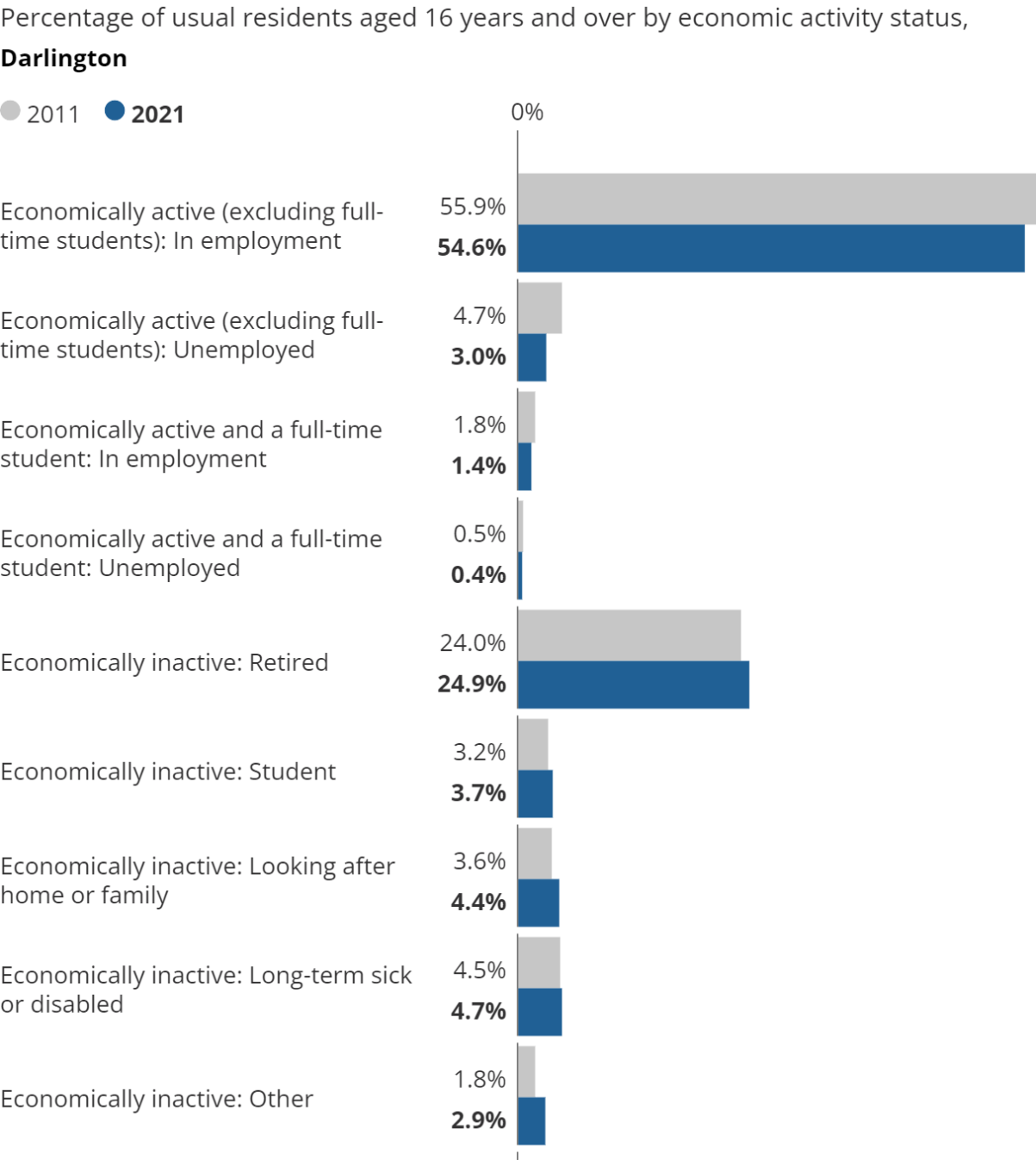
<b>Occupancy rating</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
+2 or more rooms	15682	33.6%	24332	49.7%
+1	18270	39.1%	14827	30.3%
0	11450	24.5%	8506	17.4%
-1	1149	2.5%	1106	2.3%
-2 or less	119	0.3%	145	0.3%
Total	46670	100%	48916	100%

*(negative figure implies a households accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required - overcrowded, 0 the accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms and plus figures accommodation has more bedrooms than required – under occupied)*

Occupancy levels in Darlington generally show low levels of overcrowding. The proportion of under-occupied households has increased from 72.7% to 80% between 2011 and 2021. The proportion of households with 2 or more bedrooms not occupied has increased fairly substantially from 33.6% to 49.7%, although the number with 1 bedroom not occupied has decreased from 39.1% to 30.3%.

<b>Tenure</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Owned: Owns outright	13810	29.6%	16222	33.2%
Owned: Owns with a mortgage or loan	16479	35.3%	14474	29.6%
Shared ownership: Shared ownership	178	0.4%	190	0.4%
Social rented: Rents from council or Local Authority	5238	11.2%	5112	10.5%
Social rented: Other social rented	1990	4.3%	2819	5.8%
Private rented: Private landlord or letting agency	7758	16.6%	9035	18.5%
Private rented: Other private rented	755	1.6%	1043	2.1%
Lives rent free	462	1%	20	0.04%
Total	46670	100%	48915	100%

A large proportion of homes in Darlington are owned (outright or with a mortgage) 62.8%. Private rented is the second largest category at 20.6%. The proportion of homes owned is less in 2021 than 2011 by 2.1% with the proportion private rented increasing. The number of homes owned outright has increased by 3.6% and the number owned with a mortgage or loan has decreased.



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

The percentage of those who are economically active but unemployed in Darlington has reduced from 4.7% in 2011 to 3% in 2021 which is a positive change. The percentage for England in 2021 was 3.5%, showing Darlington is slightly better than the national level. Although those who are economically active and in employment has reduced slightly in Darlington over the period by 1.3%. The percentage of retired has increased by 0.9%, linking in with the data on the ageing population.

### **Other key points**

- 96.3% of people in Darlington do not have a second address.
- The majority of households have mains gas only central heating at 81.1%.
- A large proportion of communal establishment population is male aged 50 years and over (26.7%) and females aged 50 and over (57.5%).
- The management type of communal establishments are largely care homes with nursing included at 31.1% (percentage of the number of people within that category) and care homes without nursing 56.8%. Smaller proportions of type include children's homes (1.6%), mental health unit/hospital (4.9%) and hostels for the homeless (2.1%).
- In 2021, 45.5% of Darlington residents described their health as "very good", increasing from 43.2% in 2011. Those describing their health as "good" fell from 35.7% to 34.8% in that period.
- The proportion of Darlington residents describing their health as "very bad" in 2021 was 1.2% (similar to 2011), while those describing their health as "bad" fell from 4.7% to 4.5%.
- 8.4% of Darlington residents were identified as being disabled and limited a lot in 2021. This figure decreased from 9.8% in 2011. Just under one in nine people (11.0%) were identified as being disabled and limited a little, compared with 10.8% in 2011. The proportion of Darlington residents who were not disabled increased from 79.4% to 80.7% over the ten year period.
- In 2021, 94.4% of people in Darlington identified their ethnic group within the "White" category (compared with 96.2% in 2011). 2.8% of Darlington residents identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category, up from 2.1% in 2011. The 0.7 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area.
- 95.4% of households, including all adults, have English as their main language in 2021.

### **ONS house price and earnings data**

Set out below is most recent data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for Darlington on median house prices and median earnings (released March 2024). The values shown both measures have been gradually increasing over time. Median house prices have dipped slightly since 2021. When looking at affordability, the ratio between median house price and median earnings, this is better in Darlington than in comparison to the national figures for England over the same period. The ratio figures are generally close to those of the northeast region with some small fluctuations.

Lower quartile house prices better reflect the entry level housing market prices. For Darlington in 2023 this was £105,000 with lower quartile gross annual earnings being £23,084. This resulting in an affordability ratio of 4.39. Nationally the ratio was 7.12 and the northeast region 4.16 in 2023. Again, this reflects better affordability in comparison to the national context and following the regional trend.

Year (ending Sept)	Median house price	Median earnings	Median affordability ratio
2012	122,000	23,206	5.26
2013	119,973	22,461	5.34
2014	124,950	26,231	4.76
2015	131,000	25,299	5.18
2016	133,000	27,514	4.83
2017	137,975	27,797	4.96
2018	139,000	26,445	5.26
2019	140,250	27,703	5.06
2020	150,000	27,039	5.55
2021	160,000	30,435	5.26
2022	155,000	29,146	5.32
2023	153,500	30,561	5.02

(ONS 2024)



## Local Context

This section provides some context to how the Homes Strategy interlinks with the Council's other existing and emerging plans and strategies.

### Council Plan (2024-27)

The Council Plan proposes a long term vision and ambitions for Darlington, with priorities for delivery from 2024-27. At the heart of the plan is the vision to be one of the best places in the UK to live, learn, work and invest – with a strong economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all. Three core values feed into the plan which are:

- addressing inequalities;
- tackling climate change; and
- efficient and effective use of resources.

The plan then sets out six priorities for the Council for the next three years:

- economy
- homes
- living well
- children and young people
- communities
- environment

Key deliverables are set out for each of the six priorities and delivery will be through key strategies and plans. The Homes Strategy will align with and support the above values and priorities. It will also assist with achieving a number of the key deliverables such as meeting current and future housing needs, supporting vulnerable and homeless people and improving the quality of housing. In addition, it will also support growing the economy and delivering more homes particularly in the town centre.

### Darlington Local Plan (2016 – 2036)

The Darlington Local Plan was adopted by the Council in February 2022 and replaced the Darlington Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy (May 2011) and the saved policies of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan (1997, including adopted alterations 2001). It provides an up-to-date statutory development plan for the Borough under which planning decisions can be made.

The Government sets out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that the planning system should be plan-led. All local authorities should aim to adopt succinct and up-to-date plans to provide a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities. The Local Plan gives the Council control over the location, type and quality of new development. It gives capacity to resist development proposals which do not adhere to Local Plan policies. The Council can also be proactive in accommodating growth and supporting infrastructure through the development plan.

The policies, proposal and site allocations in the Local Plan are designed to address a range of specific issues and challenges. Successful implementation will contribute towards economic growth in Darlington and achieving sustainable development. The Local Plan outlines a number of strategic aims and objectives which are in line with the Council's Plan. It also sets out a number of policies which seek to deliver:

- A minimum of 492 net additional homes over the plan period to meet identified housing needs.
- Sufficient housing land allocations to meet the borough's needs including two sustainable garden communities at Greater Faverdale (Burtree) and Skerningham.
- Affordable housing via market led schemes and exception sites.
- Appropriate mix and size of homes including adaptable and accessible homes, specialised housing and custom and self-build housing.
- Sufficient site and pitch allocations for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation to meet local needs.
- New employment land allocations and safeguarding existing employment areas.
- Protection and enhancement of our town and local centres.
- Regeneration of the Town Centre Fringe
- Protection and enhancement of our natural environment and heritage assets.
- Sustainable development and mitigation and adaptation to climate change.
- Supporting the health, wellbeing and amenity of the Borough's residents.
- Sustainable and accessible transport infrastructure.

The Homes Strategy is very much interlinked with the Local Plan and will support the delivery of a number of the policy requirements. The Strategy will however provide more detail in a number of areas in terms of the aims and aspirations of the Council. For example with regards to improving conditions of existing homes, supporting vulnerable residents, retirement living, and supported housing.

### **Relevant Council Strategies**

- Council Plan (2024 – 2027)
- Local Plan (2016 – 2036)
- Greater Faverdale (Burtree Garden Village) Design Code (2022)
- Skerningham Garden Village Design Code (2023)
- Design of New Development SPD (2011)
- Discount Market Sale Guidance (2023)
- First Homes Policy Position Statement (2022)
- Housing Services Allocation Policy (2023– 28)
- Housing Services Repairs Handbook
- Housing Services Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy (2023-27)
- Housing Services Low-Cost Home Ownership Policy (2022)
- Private Sector Housing Strategy (2022 – 2027)
- Climate Change Strategy (2020)
- Housing Services Climate Change Strategy (2024-2029)
- Town Centre Strategy (2019 – 2030)
- Town Centre Fringe Masterplan (2013)
- A Strategy for Later Life (2008 – 2021)
- Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2025– 2030)
- Economic Strategy 2012 – 2026
- Adult Social Care Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy
- Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy & Market Position Statement (2023- 2026)
- Looked After Children & Care Leavers Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy Refresh (2022)
- Darlington Transport Plan (2022 – 2030)

## **Tees Valley Context**

This section provides some context to how this strategy interlinks with existing and emerging strategies and projects in the Tees Valley sub-region.

The Tees Valley sub-region consists of five local authorities, Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-On-Tees. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) was created in 2016. A combined authority enables a group of two or more councils to work together and take collective decisions. It can also take advantage of powers and resources devolved from central Government. TVCAs main remit is to drive economic growth and job creation in the sub-region. The local authorities work closely with the business community and other partners to support the growth of the economy.

The devolution deal signed with Government in 2015 included a 30-year agreement worth more than £450million plus a further £500million to invest in local projects over the following five years, allocated by Government. Powers and responsibilities passed to TVCA cover areas such as skills, business, investment, housing, transport culture and tourism. However, the Combined Authority is not responsible for the planning and delivery of housing across the sub-region. The individual Council's remain as the local planning authorities for their borough's.

TVCA produced a revised Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for the Tees Valley in 2016. It includes a set of priorities to improve, diversify and increase growth in the local economy to benefit businesses and residents. The ambition of the SEP is to create 25,000 jobs and add £2.8bn to the economy by 2026. The main aims of the plan include increasing the supply of good quality housing, revitalising town centres and areas of poor-quality housing, and bringing forward brownfield land for development. It is important the supply and mix of new homes across the sub-region align with economic growth ambitions and support the aspirations of the SEP.

In order to achieve the aims and ambitions of the SEP on housing, TVCA are also creating effective relationships with key partners, including the five local authorities, registered providers, landowners, developers, private sector investors, Homes England, and Government. They are also trying to work with investors to stimulate new entrants to the market, including build-to-rent through the private rented sector. Opportunities for sustainable growth are also being explored through the principles of new garden village settlements.

## **National Context**

The housing landscape nationally is ever-changing, impacted by alterations to government policy, new legislation, periods of economic change, and other influences. This section provides some context to how the strategy links with matters at the national level.

The government have indicated over recent years that housing, in particular addressing the national housing crisis, is one of the country's key priorities. Some of the focus has been on reforms to the planning system, including revisions to the NPPF and associated Planning Practice Guidance. A recent change has been an alteration to the standard method for calculating housing need, a tool for local authorities preparing Local Plans. First Homes were also introduced in 2021, a new type of affordable housing aimed at first time buyers. More recently there has been an emphasis on delivering more social housing. Reforms have been focused on increasing the delivery of new homes and getting more people on the property ladder.

Reforms have also taken place in the welfare system, including the introduction of Universal Credit and reductions in the household benefit cap which have created challenges for tenants, landlords and local authorities. As of June 2023, over 73% of Council tenants were in receipt of some form of welfare benefits including Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. Of these over 1900 receive an element of Universal Credit.

The economic climate has been turbulent over the last two decades which has heavily impacted on many aspects of housing. The global financial crisis in 2008 constrained housing delivery for a number of years and people's ability to borrow and obtain mortgages. Levels of investment in affordable housing has put pressure on the availability of homes for those on lower incomes. When we talk about affordable housing in this strategy we follow the definition as set in national planning policy (NPPF). This covers social and affordable rent, affordable routes to home ownership and discount market sale housing, all of which can be provided for by the Council and Registered Providers.

More recently the pandemic and the political instability around Brexit and changes in government have affected the housing market with regards to delivery, demand and borrowing. This has also taken place against a backdrop of rising house prices and rents.

### **Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023**

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act aims to address geographic disparities across the UK. The Act has a number of parts which relate to housing. For example there are measures to increase transparency in housing and land markets, direct more developer and landowner profits to affordable housing, address empty homes, give smaller builders greater opportunities to enter the market and support for self-build/custom housebuilding. There are also elements to speed up and streamline the process of preparing Local Plans and changes to the Development Management system.

Before the Act can take full effect, the Government will work on the detail of regulations, policy and guidance associated with the legislation. They will consult on how a number of important provisions can be taken forward. The Housing and Planning Policy Teams will monitor and engage with this work as more information becomes available to ensure the Council can meet and address the proposals.

### **Social Housing Regulation Act 2024**

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act aims to facilitate a new, proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords on consumer issues such as safety, transparency, and tenant engagement, with new enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords. It aims to drive significant change in landlord behaviour to focus on the needs of their tenants and ensure landlords are held to account for their performance.

### **Government Funding**

The Council has been working with partners to obtain Government financial support for new housing developments such as the Brownfield Housing Fund (BHF). This initiative is funded by MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government). It aims to bring previously developed brownfield land back into productive use and helps regenerate areas. It also increases the delivery of housing stock in sustainable locations and supports the construction industry.

In summary, the Council supports the increased national focus on housing. The Homes Strategy has been prepared with the national context in mind and the Council will continue to work to meet housing needs, responding to wider reforms and challenges at the national level when needed.

## Recent Achievements

This strategy is an update and refresh of the Council's previous Housing Strategy. Some aspects of housing have changed since this time such as public sector funding, welfare reform, and national policy changes, however the fundamental issues in relation to housing in the borough have remained similar.

There have been a number of achievements since the publication of the previous housing strategy. This has involved partnership working and delivery of the Council's own housing stock. Achievements have included:

- Over the period of the previous strategy approximately 1,800 net additional dwellings were built (2012/13 to 2017/18 financial years). Of these 558 were affordable homes.
- Since the end of the previous strategy (from 2018/19 to 2023/24) approximately 3,036 net additional dwellings have been built. Of these 605 were affordable homes.
- During the previous strategy 264 Council houses were built and since April 2018 156 Council homes have been constructed.
- The Council adopted a new Local Plan in February 2022 which sets out a housing requirement, site allocations, affordable housing requirements and requirements in terms of mix, type and size. This is a great achievement as it enables the Council to shape the strategic delivery of new homes which will meet identified quantitative and qualitative needs of the borough.
- Regeneration has taken place at Red Hall, Branksome and Firth Moor, including external wall insulation, solar panel installation and new external doors.
- Regeneration of the Central Park area and the creation of a thriving new community. A mixed-use development site including the delivery of new homes, education campus (Darlington College and Teesside University) and commercial development (Business Central and the National Biologics Manufacturing Centre).
- The Council worked in partnership with Keepmoat to deliver 81 new homes at Redhall (Fairway Development) which incorporated Healthy New Town principles
- During the period of the previous strategy (2012/13 – 2017/18) 1648 Council properties received upgrades, including work to heating, bathrooms and kitchens.

## Key Challenges

Outlined below are some of the key challenges the Council will be facing on housing matters over the next five years. These issues have helped to inform the objectives and priorities of the strategy.

- Maintaining housing completions to meet the housing requirement particularly during periods of economic instability.
- Maximising the delivery of affordable housing when this can be constrained by development viability and the availability of public funding.
- Increasing numbers of people on the waiting list for affordable housing owned by the Council.
- Reducing levels of under-occupancy in homes.
- Ensuring housing investment contributes to the local economy.
- Raising standards in the private rented sector.
- Reducing the number of long-term empty properties.
- Increasing fuel poverty.
- Ensuring energy efficiency of new and existing housing.
- Increasing renewable energy technologies in homes.
- Continuing the physical regeneration of poorer quality housing areas and ensuring that this also provides economic and social benefits.
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable people.
- Increasing numbers of people presenting as homeless since 2020.
- Meeting the needs of an increasingly ageing population. Providing specialist accommodation for older people but also supporting them to live independently for as long as possible.
- Mitigating the impacts of welfare reform.
- Meeting governmental and regulatory standards i.e. Decent Homes Standards across an ageing housing stock.
- Economic climate – rising inflation, interest rates, resource costs and energy costs.

## Key Objectives and Priorities

The Homes Strategy sets an overall vision and three key objectives and associated priorities for over the next five years which are set out below. The objectives and priorities have been established utilising a comprehensive evidence base and existing Council policy and set to address the challenges identified. For each objective and priority, it is also outlined what outcomes and actions we aim to achieve over the following five year period (summarised in appendix 1).

The document provides a framework for the actions the Council and our partners will take to deliver, maintain and improve the quality of housing to meet local needs and to address the boroughs housing challenges. It is designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of our approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.

### Housing Vision

A vision for housing in the borough:

***Providing high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all.***

#### **Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

- Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents
- Ensuring a suitable housing mix
- Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent
- Helping First Time Buyers
- Promoting Modern Methods of Construction
- Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.

#### **Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

- Ensuring high quality homes in the right places
- Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change
- Housing regeneration and renewal

#### **Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

- Delivering quality retirement living
- Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs
- Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing
- Minimising the impacts of welfare reform



## **Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents**

The Local Plan sets the minimum number of homes required each year (housing requirement) over the plan period (2016-36). It ensures that a sufficient amount and variety of land comes forward for housing where it is needed, in sustainable locations.

The housing requirement figure of 492 net additional dwellings, a total requirement of 9,840 dwellings for the plan period was calculated and evidenced as part of the SHMA (2017).

The housing requirement will be delivered through a combination of completions on existing development sites, housing land allocations set out in the Local Plan and other windfall sites which gain planning permission over the period. The spatial distribution of the allocations has followed the existing settlement hierarchy, focusing largely on the main urban area. Sites are situated within the main urban area and as urban extensions, mainly to the north east and west. This strategy ensures that housing is focused in areas that provide or will be able to provide the level of services, facilities and employment opportunities that are required to support communities. Housing is not planned for in isolation. The Local Plan also considers and plans for local community facilities and infrastructure setting specific requirements.

There are two large urban extensions in the plan which now have garden community status, Skerningham and Greater Faverdale. Both sites will deliver a large proportion of the plan's housing numbers, some of which will be developed beyond the plan period (Skerningham 4,500 dwellings and Greater Faverdale 2,000 dwellings approximately). These sites may seem overly large to some, however rather than pursuing piecemeal development the aim is to create well planned communities which are supported by the necessary infrastructure and community facilities, integrating them with the existing urban area.

For both Skerningham and Greater Faverdale, Local Plan policies require the Council to prepare design codes for the areas. Design codes have been prepared and adopted for both sites. The documents set out strategic design principles and requirements that development schemes must adhere to. The approach aims to create distinctive, sustainable, high-quality communities in which to live and work. Both design codes also reflect the requirements of the National Model Design Code (2021) which provides detailed guidance on the production of such documents to promote successful design.

The Council prioritises the development of brownfield land in line with national planning policy. There are however a number of greenfield allocations in the Local Plan. This is because there can be difficulties in bringing forward previously developed sites and allocations in the plan must be deliverable. There is also simply not enough brownfield land available to meet needs. The Council will continue to support and encourage development of brownfield land through the Local Plan and via other routes such as the brownfield land register and supporting partners such as TVCA to access central government funding streams. We will be proactive in removing obstacles to the redevelopment of these sites. A key priority for the Council is also the regeneration of brownfield land within the town centre which will be discussed further on in this document.

Developing sufficient housing of the right type and in the right places is also important for supporting the local economy. The Council is committed to supporting the economic growth of the borough and the authority is active in attracting new businesses and industries to the area. It is vital to retain and grow the working age population in order to increase employment and stimulate economic growth. The housing requirement reflects projected employment growth for the borough over the plan period (7,000 new full time equivalent jobs) and the additional workers required. Not delivering sufficient homes to support growth could result in economic and social decline.

The Local Plan will be reviewed every 5 years or sooner in line with national policy. This will help to ensure that Darlington’s needs and aspirations for housing are met. Supporting guidance and evidence base documents will also be reviewed/produced over the lifetime of the homes strategy. Opportunities will be sought where possible to help assist and promote housing delivery.

**Ensuring a suitable housing mix**

The SHMA 2020 assessed the type and size of houses within the current housing stock in the Borough. Whilst not highlighting any significant imbalances it does outline a greater proportion of need for 3 bedroom market homes and 2/3 bedroom affordable homes. The policy approach in the Local Plan (policy H4 Housing Mix) encourages a mix of new homes consistent with the need identified in the most recent SHMA. The overall mix suggested (affordable and market) in the assessment is set out below.

1 bed	6.5%
2 bed	32%
3 bed	50%
4+ bed	11.5%

Ensuring an appropriate mix of housing can also assist with maintaining balanced occupancy levels. As mentioned above census data shows that Darlington generally has low levels of overcrowding but the proportion of households with 2 or more bedrooms not occupied is high at 49.7%. At the end of 2024 the Council estimated that there were 319 Council homes underoccupied (36% of total stock).

Building an appropriate mix of homes in terms of size, type and quality can give residents more opportunities to downsize or move into more suitable accommodation such as shelter/extra care. This can potentially free up larger family homes in the market. The Council will continue to monitor the levels for occupancy rates and look at ways in which to positively influence this issue. There is the possibility within the Councils own house building programme and joint venture arrangements to influence the mix of housing types which has a potential to reduce under occupation. We can also look at further opportunities for new retirement living.

Self and custom build homes have been encouraged by central government more recently. In general terms self and custom build is where an individual or group builds their own home or contacts a builder to design a 'custom built' home for them. Such properties bring benefits as they help to diversify the housing market and increase consumer choice. Self-build and custom housebuilders choose the design and layout of their home and can be innovative in both its design and construction.

The Council promotes self and custom build and launched the Self & Custom Build Register in April 2016 . In February 2025 there were 55 registrations, with 4 of these on Part 1. This indicates some interest in schemes in Darlington, but a large amount of land would not be required to meet the

need on the register at this time. Also, many small housing schemes contribute to self and custom build provision and these will continue to arise as windfall schemes in the future. The Council will however work with developers and landowners to ensure that some plots come forward.

We will also promote the register and self-build more generally. Monitoring demand and assisting where possible, linking up those with an interest on the register with permissioned sites. A number of Local Plan policies encourage and support the delivery of this type of housing. Site specific policies for Skerningham and Greater Faverdale require self/custom build on these large allocations and so delivery is expected in these locations in the longer term.

**Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent**

The Council is the largest provider of affordable housing in the borough and delivery of new affordable homes is a key priority. Affordable housing provides opportunities for people who cannot afford to rent or buy on the open market and also for those people who work in different aspects of the economy. It also assists in reducing homelessness and overcrowding. We are committed to exploring all opportunities to increase the number of affordable homes in the Borough.

The SHMA (2020) identified a substantial need for affordable homes in the borough. The assessment identified a need of 233 affordable dwellings per annum. This is broken down into households unable to afford (163 dwellings per annum) and households aspiring to home ownership (70 dwellings per annum).

The Council recognises that to address this need affordable homes are required in the borough and is therefore active through a range of measures including delivery. We are committed to building sustainable, safe communities and have a strategic ambition to deliver mixed tenures. Our homes offer a high standard of accommodation that meets the Decent Homes Standard and we provide a range of quality services to tenants. The Council’s housing stock comprises of 5269 homes. A breakdown of the house type and number of bedrooms is set out below.

Dwelling Type	Number
Bungalow	344
Flat	2333
House	2580
Maisonette	12
TOTAL	5269

Number of Bedrooms	Number
1-bed	2073
2-bed	1671
3-bed	1483
4-bed	40
5-bed	2

The great quality of our homes and the services provided mean they are in high demand, which is why we have an ambitious programme to build new Council homes in Darlington. Our new build programme is funded through capital receipts from right to buy sales, grant funding from Homes England and through prudential borrowing. For 2023/24 the Council’s capital programme includes £15.673m to deliver our new build Council housing programme.

Current new build projects include developments at Neasham Road, Sherborne Close and 12-18 Skinnergate. The Neasham Road site is currently under construction and the Council are building 130 affordable properties to rent and 20 Rent to Buy homes through Council (Housing Revenue Account) and Homes England funding. Development partner (Esh) are delivering the remainder of the properties on-site. Several new build opportunity sites have been identified and are currently being explored and worked up in detail to seek planning permission. The Council will continue to progress its ambitious build programme, however this will be subject to national economic challenges such as the rise in inflation and issues in the construction sector such as a reduced supply of workers.

It is recognised that there has been a recent focus from Government in prioritising social rent housing. The Council are supportive of this as social rent is set via a formula linked to local incomes and can better address affordable needs. We will therefore look to maximise the delivery of new homes for social rent through Council led schemes and through Council involvement in other developments. Recognising that for some Council led schemes this may sometimes best be achieved through the receipt of a commuted sum for the building of homes for social rent elsewhere.

The Council operates a choice-based lettings system, which allows residents, including existing tenants to apply for affordable properties to meet their housing needs. The Council's Allocation Policy 2023-28 explains how our affordable homes are allocated, based on an assessment of the housing needs of applicants. It also outlines how we advertise and let the majority of our available homes via the choice-based letting scheme. Registered Providers (RP's) also let an agreed number of their available homes in Darlington on the scheme. Applicants are able to apply for homes both for rent and low-cost home ownership options.

We have implemented a new lettings system 'Darlington Home Search' which went live in June 2023 <https://darlingtonhomesearch.housingjigsaw.co.uk/> As part of this we are currently analysing the demand data from the waiting list. This will feed into a detailed housing needs assessment which will inform the type and size of new affordable homes we deliver in the future. Recent data from the system is set out below and shows the breakdown of all live applications for Council housing by house size and by priority banding at the end of 2024 (band 1 being the highest priority).

Applicants Band	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	4 Bedroom	Total Applicants
Band 1	124	112	55	11	302
Band 2	150	72	33	16	271
Band 3	75	109	80	45	309
Band 4	678	369	159	22	1228
Total					2110

The Council is also a registered landlord on Home Swapper <https://www.homeswapper.co.uk/> This is a nationwide mutual exchange service for affordable housing tenants. The service allows tenants to connect with potential properties to swap with and message other tenants.

Consistent with the key aims of the Governments 2020 'Charter for Social Housing Residents' the Council also offers a range of low-cost options to help Council tenants buy their own home who would otherwise be unable to afford to purchase a property outright from the open market. Our

Low-Cost Home Ownership Policy 2022 explains the range of home ownership options available for our properties. It includes requirements, eligibility, costs, charges and how to apply. The options covered include:

- Right to Buy
- Rent to Buy

The policy aims to promote the options available and support those who would struggle to buy a property on the open market. It ensures a fair, consistent and effective approach.

In order to further meet needs and maximise delivery of affordable homes, the Council's Local Plan sets affordable housing requirements for market led schemes of 10 dwellings or more (policy H5 Affordable Housing). The level and type of affordable housing required is dependent of the location of the scheme but can range from 10% to 30% of the total size of the development. This is to reflect development viability and to ensure that the requirements do not stifle development. Housebuilders are expected to meet these affordable housing requirements. If they consider that they would make a scheme unviable, they must submit a detailed viability assessment to demonstrate this.

There is also a tenure split in the policy between affordable rent and affordable home ownership to ensure needs are met. Affordable home ownership can include discount market sale homes, usually sold at 20% below market value. The Council has prepared a guidance document on this type of housing which sets out the eligibility criteria for these homes. This includes a local connection to Darlington, such as already living or working in the borough.

Preference is for affordable homes to be provided on-site alongside market housing to create mixed and balanced communities. There are some exceptions where a financial contribution will be sought and will be used to meet affordable needs.

The Affordable Homes Programme will also contribute towards the delivery of affordable homes in the borough. This scheme provides grant funding to support the capital costs of developing affordable housing for rent or sale. It is issued by Homes England and is largely used by RPs. The Council will support and work in partnership with these organisations to maximise investment in new affordable housing. This will include supporting bids for grant funding in appropriate locations. This can involve assisting with demand data from our waiting list and discussing nomination agreements for RP properties.

We will support partnership working which will include organising an annual housing conference and forums for engaging social and community housing providers.

### **Helping First Time Buyers**

The Government are keen to increase home ownership and a key element of this is helping first time buyers get on the housing ladder. We recognise that many young people aspire to homeownership but can find this difficult due to a number of barriers, largely financial. Affordability in Darlington and the ratio between lower quartile house prices and lower quartile earnings are better than across England as a whole. However, costs of purchasing a home are still high and local people can find it difficult particularly as the government's Help to Buy loan scheme has ended at the present time.

The Council aims to assist first time buyers in a number of ways. For example, a number of the low-cost home ownership products which the Council provide are available to first time buyers (rent to buy and right to buy). More generally the affordable housing policy (H5) of the Local Plan also

requires a proportion of affordable home ownership products on market schemes, these can assist first time buyers.

We also have a First Homes Policy Position Statement (2022) which sets out a requirement that 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations should be First Homes. These are a type of affordable home specifically for first time buyers.

### **Promoting Modern Methods of Construction**

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) is a wide term, embracing a range of offsite manufacturing and onsite techniques that provide alternatives to traditional house building. The process has been described as a way to produce more, better quality homes in less time. The Government has expressed support for MMC and as a way to help solve the country's housing crisis. This is an area of construction which the Council is exploring in order to increase our supply of high-quality sustainable homes.

There has been a recently a growing level of engagement with MMC across the housing-development sector, from existing house builders and housing associations, through to new SMEs setting themselves up specifically to exploit opportunities in MMC. However, it is still not a method which is widely used. As well as improving speed and efficiency in housebuilding it also has other advantages, for example, improved quality and building performance, environmental benefits such as reducing road traffic movements from construction vehicles, energy usage can be reduced both in construction and occupation of the homes and there are significant reductions in waste materials.

There are still numerous barriers to MMC such as public and developer confidence, concern from lenders, levels of investment and ensuring the workforce have the necessary skills. Despite this, we will continue to examine options of MMC and how they can be applied to our house building plans. In addition, we will also work with partners across the Tees Valley to help tackle the challenges and to ensure that MMC plays a role in delivering high quality, sustainable housing in the borough.

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.**

There is a long history of gypsies and travellers living within Darlington. There are numerous gypsy and traveller families residing in the borough and it is important that their accommodation needs are met. The Government's Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2024) outlines that local planning authorities should identify the need for travelling sites, pitches and plots, then allocate sites to meet this identified need.

The Council undertook a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in 2017. This study identified a need of 5 residential pitches between 2017 – 2022 (1 per annum). Evidence showed a further need arising in the period 2022-37 which was calculated at 46 pitches (3 per annum). The assessment also identified a need for 6-8 plots for travelling show people over the plan period until 2037.

The above needs are reflected in the adopted Local Plan (2022) policy H9 and supporting text. To meet these needs two allocations are set out in the policy which are extensions to existing sites; Honeypot Lane (8 pitches) and Rowan West/East complex (25 pitches). The Local Plan also sets out that evidence over the last 18 years supports making an allowance for 4 pitches per year coming forward as windfalls.

Pitches and plots are monitored annually through the Council's caravan count which provides data on accommodation supply and an indication of unmet demand. We will also be looking to review the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in the near future.

## **What we aim to achieve 2025 - 2030**

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents**

- Deliver a minimum of 492 net additional homes per annum.
- Work with developers to remove barriers to housing delivery, particularly on Local Plan housing allocations.
- Work with developers and partners to bring forward the garden village sites at Skerningham & Greater Faverdale.
- Review the brownfield land register.
- Work with partners such as TVCA on funding bids such as the Brownfield Housing Fund and the Brownfield Land Release Fund.
- Review the Local Plan and associated evidence base, such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, when required.

### **Ensuring a suitable housing mix**

- Ensure development schemes provide an appropriate mix of housing in terms of type, size and tenure.
- Explore opportunities via the Council's house building programme and joint venture arrangements to deliver an appropriate mix of homes and retirement living.
- Maintain and promote the custom and self-build register and linking up those interested with permissioned sites.

### **Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent**

- Continue to progress the Council's new build housing developments and explore opportunities for new sites.
- Maximise the delivery of social rent homes through Council led schemes.
- Develop opportunities to deliver new Council homes in schemes led by others.
- The purchase and lease of additional houses to use as temporary accommodation and homes for social rent.
- Ensure opportunities for current Council tenants and prospective tenants are easily available to apply for affordable homes that meet their needs.
- Identify opportunities to provide low cost home ownership properties in new build Council housing.
- Require between 10% and 30% affordable housing (on-site) on all appropriate market housing developments, in line with Local Plan policy.
- Secure the correct tenure split of affordable housing on market led schemes, as required by Local Plan policy.
- Work with partners to maximise the delivery of grant funded affordable housing in the borough.
- Organise an annual housing conference.

### **Helping First Time Buyers**

- Continue to promote the Council's low-cost home ownership homes (Council owned properties).



- Require 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations should be first homes.
- Require the appropriate proportion of affordable home ownership products on market schemes in line with Local Plan policy.

#### **Promoting Modern Methods of Construction**

- Explore opportunities for MMC in all developments, Council and private.
- Work with partners to develop and deliver MMC.

#### **Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.**

- Continue to monitor traveller accommodation via the annual caravan count.
- Review the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

## **Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

### **Ensuring high quality homes in the right places**

The quality and standard of existing homes in the borough is important across all tenures. We know that poor housing conditions greatly impact on the health and well-being of our residents, particularly those who are elderly, economically disadvantaged or vulnerable. Tackling poor housing conditions has multiple benefits including gains in asset value, health, wellbeing, life chances and economic performance.

Recent data released from the census showed in Darlington, the percentage of households in the social rented sector rose from 15.5% in 2011 to 16.2% in 2021. During the same period, the regional percentage fell from 23.0% to 22.0%. Whereas private renting in Darlington increased from 18.2% to 20.6%, while the rate of home ownership decreased from 64.9% to 62.8%.

There are many ways in which the Council improves the quality and standards of the borough's housing. Some of the main actions are set out below.

#### ***Private Sector Housing***

The Council's Private Sector Housing Team aims to raise standards to support residents and communities. Housing should be safe, affordable, warm, secure and sustainable to support the most vulnerable in our community. Standards should also be met in terms of reducing fuel poverty and working towards achieving net zero to combat climate change. The Private Sector Housing Strategy (2022-2027) sets out a number of aims and the related actions which the Private Sector Housing Team carry out.

It is important to ensure decent quality homes in the private rented sector and the team works to ensure standards are maintained. When problems causing a health and safety implication are found or complaints made regarding rented properties, landlords are required to put these issues right, or potentially face enforcement action. Standards are assessed against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Guidance is followed from the HHSRS or other housing, environmental or public health legislation. More generally the team increase awareness of landlords and tenants' rights, responsibilities and the support available. This ensures safe habitable properties for tenants.

Officers also take area based action to tackle health inequalities in communities where housing conditions are worst. Focusing attention in more deprived wards such as Bank Top and Lascelles, Park East, Northgate and North Road. Officers work pro-actively with private rented properties (rather than waiting for complaints) as it is recognised that tenants can be reluctant to complain about their living conditions. The Council is also looking to introduce a landlord licensing scheme and voluntary landlord charter to hold them to account. This is in the early stages of development, and we are considering potential options.

Housing of multiple occupation (HMOs) can form an important part of the housing mix in terms of providing affordable, low cost housing. However, they can also cause amenity issues when concentrations of these properties form (e.g. parking, noise, bin storage). The Private Sector Housing Team inspect HMOs and administer the scheme for mandatory licensing of relevant large HMOs. Residents are safeguarded via successful licensing and proactive property inspection. HMO's that do not require a licence must still comply with appropriate standards. Given the issues HMO's can cause it is important for the Council to monitor the situation (existing and newly formed HMO's) through

data collected by private sector housing and planning. We are also looking to introduce additional controls for HMOs in order to address the issues which they can cause.

Empty properties represent a wasted resource and can cause a number of problems for the owner and the surrounding neighbourhood. In 2022, there were 623 long term vacant homes in Darlington that had been unoccupied for at least 2 years (MHCLG 2022). This represented 1% of the dwelling stock which indicates that this isn't a significant issue in the borough but there has been a rise in the amount of long term vacant by 16% from the previous year (MHCLG 2022). The Council is under no legal requirement to deal with empty homes but we do have a duty to deal with unsafe homes linked to poor housing standards. The Private Sector Housing Team aims to promote the advantages of bringing empty homes back into use (unlocking capital, reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour and regeneration benefits) whilst also outlining the risks if premises remain empty for long periods of time.

Officers maintain a database of empty residential properties to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind this. Owners of privately owned empty homes are encouraged to bring them back into use by providing an investors list of potential buyers, keen to purchase empty properties in the borough. Officers also use a range of enforcement powers to target and bring problematic properties back into use, through cross departmental working, focussing on those empty for more than two years. More broadly we are looking to review the Council's regeneration policy for empty properties across the town.

Generally, the team provide advice to property developers on matters such as design, safety standards and accessible and adaptable homes. They explore and support measures to improve energy efficiency in privately rented homes. By helping to ensure homes are adequately heated through reduced heat loss and improved heating systems, this will also reduce carbon emissions.

Officers also work with and support all residents in Darlington. We encourage and support owner occupiers to maintain safe homes by advising and signposting financial assistance that is available. The team are also proactive in improving the conditions of licensed park home sites and residential caravan sites, including the travelling community.

Through the work outlined above and by dealing with specific issues we raise standards in private sector housing. Reducing accidents and illness in the home and helping to reduce health inequalities, improving life chances across Darlington. Going forward this may also mean further Council intervention in properties and community partner involvement to raise standards.

### ***Council Housing Stock***

The Housing Services Team is committed to providing homes which are comfortable, modern, warm, energy efficient and of a good standard. We have a responsibility to ensure our homes are safe, healthy, and free from hazards. We are proud of our housing and want to continually improve so in addition to the day-to-day maintenance, significant investment is made in our housing stock each year to maintain and improve those standards. The great quality of our homes and a range of services provided, including responsive repairs and maintenance, lifeline services and emergency call out provision, mean they are in high demand.

Substantial investment in Council stock is being delivered for 2025/26 including £6.69m of revenue expenditure to fund our responsive repairs and maintenance service. Capital expenditure for the same year includes over £12.2m on improvements to homes including, heating system replacements, property adaptations, window and door replacements, kitchen and bathroom

replacements and delivering energy efficiency measures. Over the longer term (next four years) the Council's Housing Business Plan identifies a capital works budget of around £71m and a budget of £27m for responsive repairs and maintenance. This highlights the Council's commitment to continued investment.

Overall, we aid tenants who face difficulties within their household, including adaptations to our properties, gas and electrical safety checks and responding to over 15,000 repairs from our Council tenants each year. Over 50% of households in Council housing have one or more persons with a disability. We are therefore committed to providing good quality homes with generous space standards and lifetime homes principles to support people to live independently and maintain a good quality of life.

The Council's Repairs Handbook outlines tenants' rights to repairs and the responsibilities of Darlington Borough Council as a landlord. The Handbook enable's tenants to see what repairs the Council will attend to and what repairs tenants need to maintain. Housing Services also has a damp, mould and condensation policy (2023-27). We recognise the impact that these issues can have on the health and wellbeing of tenants. We have a legal responsibility to manage repairs and complete any work required to prevent damp, condensation and mould occurring.

In previous years, a percentage of our housing stock has been surveyed by an independent specialist organisation every five years, which has helped to inform our priorities. Overall, our properties have been assessed as being in good condition, reflecting our significant annual investment. Going forward, we have employed our own stock condition surveyors to undertake a three-year rolling programme of surveys to all our Council homes, to ensure we have a complete picture of the condition of our properties. All our properties reached the basic Decent Homes Standard in 2006 and continue to do so. The Decent Homes Standard is currently under review but as a service we will be working towards ensuring that we continue to have 100% of our homes meeting the standard or its replacement.

### ***Health Impact Assessments***

Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) are a process used in the planning system that identifies the health and wellbeing impacts of a development project. The assessment can recommend measures to maximise positive impacts, minimise negative impacts, and reduce health inequalities. The main focus is to put people and their health at the heart of the planning process.

The Council's Local Plan requires developments of 150 or more homes to submit an HIA as part of a planning application to explain how health considerations have informed the design. The process will help to provide better quality housing, address local health needs and tackle inequalities through influencing the wider determinants of health. Further guidance can be found at <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-and-environmental-policy/supplementary-planning-documents-and-guidance/health-impact-assessments/>

### ***Healthy New Towns***

In 2016 Darlington was identified as a NHS Healthy New Towns (HNT) pilot site which included initial funding from NHS England. The programme explored how the development of new places could improve health and wellbeing through the built environment, healthcare, service design and strong communities. Evidence suggests that the places where people live impacts on mental and physical health.

A focus of the scheme was a Keepmoat housing site at Red Hall. Planners and developers came together to collaborate on how the built design and surrounding natural environment of the development could support a healthier neighbourhood. Keepmoat homes also adapted their existing home designs to reflect lifetime home principles which address the changing needs of occupants. More generally the HNT scheme strengthened models of primary and community care and the use of digital means to delivering health care.

The six Healthy New Town principles (shown below) seek to define what makes a great place to live that supports people's physical and mental health. Although the initial work of the HNT pilot has come to an end the principles have informed the suite of policies in the Local Plan which will continue to influence development; securing better health and wellbeing outcomes for all.

- **Blue/Green Infrastructure** – to promote recreation, exercise, play, good air quality, conservation and spaces for social interaction.
- **Local Healthy Food Choices** – through local retail options or facilities to grow your own food.
- **Placemaking** – a permeable, legible environment with landmarks, good wayfinding, creating sense of neighbourhood with natural surveillance and community.
- **Economy** – good links to employment and education. Economic growth goes hand in hand with new developments, job creation and increase in incomes.
- **Social Infrastructure** – healthcare/education, local services and facilities must be clustered together to create natural local centres within walking distance; enhancing opportunities for social integration and interaction.
- **Transport and Movement** – design that encourages walking, cycling and the use of public transport rather than the private car. Supporting access to employment, education, services and aids connectivity and social cohesion.

### **Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change**

The Council has acknowledged the threat of climate change and committed the Council to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040. A Climate Change Strategy has been developed to set out the baseline of our own carbon emissions and an action plan (2021) sets out the key actions and intervention measures required to meet this commitment.

The declaration includes an emphasis on external engagement, using our position as a leader in the community to influence and persuade others to take action. We have added a new section on the Sustainable Darlington webpages to signpost developers to information and case studies of good practice <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/climate-change-and-sustainability/planning-and-climate-change/>

The target of net zero by 2040 means we need to reduce our use of fossil fuels such as gas that give off carbon emissions, reduce energy demand and opt for more environmentally friendly renewable powered measures such as solar and wind power. The strategy and action plan set out the potential actions the Council will take. Emissions from our built estate makes up almost 75% of our emissions. Tackling this is critical to us achieving our target.

A key action is to improve the energy efficiency of existing Council houses. This will reduce our carbon impact, help tackle climate change and reduce tenant's fuels bills. Our approach to improving the energy efficiency of our Council homes is set out in our Housing Services Climate Change Strategy (2024-29), approved by Cabinet in January 2024, which identifies what actions are required to work towards our Council homes being net zero. This includes ensuring the EPC rating of all our Council homes are at a minimum rating of C by 2030. Significant investment will be required but

the measures set out in our strategy, will help to reduce energy consumption which in turn assists with cost of living and fuel poverty. New build council housing also presents a unique opportunity to design and build net carbon zero buildings. This will involve prioritising carbon reduction in the design and build process and revising corporate building standards. It is cheaper to design low carbon at the outset than to retrofit in the future. Longevity should also be considered in designs, using materials which have long life spans.

The Council has already been successful in securing funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) to deliver improvements to Council homes, as follows:

- The SHDF (wave 1) scheme delivered external and cavity wall insulation, Air Source Heat Pumps, loft insulation and solar panels to 23 Council homes using £0.24m of Government funding and £0.28m of capital expenditure.
- The SHDF (wave 2) scheme is currently delivering external and cavity wall insulation, solar panels, loft insulation, double glazing, and low energy lighting to 130 Council homes using £1.27m of Government funding and £1.27m of capital expenditure.

A further £4m investment has been approved for each year in the Council's housing financial planning, which will help to deliver energy efficiency measures to properties such as replacing timber front and back doors with composite doors, improvements to external wall insulation, installation of solar panels and air source heat pumps, and insulation upgrades. The Council has also been successful in bidding for over £3.5m of funding from the Government's Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (wave 3). In total, over £18m will be invested over the next three years for improvements to 1,600 Council homes.

More generally the Council will require that all house builders in the borough deliver good sustainable design which will help to reduce carbon emissions and increase resilience to the effects of climate change. This is largely done via planning policies in the Local Plan. Developments should demonstrate that the layout, orientation and design of buildings help to reduce the need for energy consumption. They should be energy efficient and implement measures to reduce carbon emissions.

A range of other requirements are also sought and encouraged to ensure housing developments are of a sustainable design. This includes:

- Building fabric which is suitable for a changing climate including increasing temperature and increasing storm events.
- Including renewable energy generation such as solar panels alongside heat pumps to minimise the energy use at the site.
- Prioritising sustainable urban drainage systems on schemes and using permeable surfacing materials to help alleviate surface water run off.
- Appropriate landscaping to maximise shade, carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
- Electric vehicle charging points.
- Cycle storage.
- Ensure that recent uplifts in building regulations parts L, F, O and S are taken into consideration.

In 2025 compliance with a new Future Homes Standard will become mandatory. This will be implemented through building regulations and aims to increase the energy efficiency of homes (homes will produce 75-80% less carbon than those built under the current standards). The technical

details of the Future Homes Standard are still to be confirmed. The Council's Building Control Team will enforce the new regulations when they come into effect.

More generally the Council will continue to encourage and promote enhanced sustainable design in new homes which exceed building regulations standards where possible.

## **Housing Regeneration and Renewal**

### ***Town Centre***

The town centre is a key priority and focus of the Council. Towns and cities across the UK have seen huge changes in the make-up of their local high streets. There has been closures of many prominent retailers, changing business models and changing shopping patterns. This has created a need for town centres to develop business investment plans and provide multiple uses such as, health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as retail.

The Council's Local Plan and Town Centre Strategy encourage housing development in the town centre on brownfield land, to create a choice of high-quality residential accommodation. This will help to improve the look and feel of the town centre and contribute to housing provision, economic growth and the evening economy. A master planning exercise has been undertaken to identify locations and opportunities for residential development. We look to work with private sector partners, including using our own assets, to increase the amount of residential properties in the town centre. We are also working with current owners to increase the number of homes above shops to contribute to a 'living town centre'.

Through the Town Centre Strategy and specific funding streams the Council is working on a number of targeted interventions in the town centre to develop new housing. Some of these are set out below.

- ***Skinnergate & The Yards*** – 16 new homes being developed. Encouraging more mixed-use buildings and increasing the number of homes in the area.
- ***Crown Street / Residential Quarter*** - regenerating vacant sites and premises whilst exploiting the potential to open up the River Skerne via high quality public realm improvements.
- ***Northgate Masterplan*** – opportunity for a residential led development close to the town centre, linking in with the wider North Road Gateway proposals.

### ***Town Centre Fringe***

The Town Centre Fringe (to the east and north of the town centre) is a priority location for brownfield development and regeneration within the Borough. It is an extensive area over 70ha and contains a mix of employment, residential, retail, leisure, car parking and other uses. The regeneration area is identified in the Local Plan and in 2013 the Council prepared the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan.

The Fringe has many advantages for future development; it has a central location near the town centre, contains key buildings such as the Hippodrome and the River Skerne flows through it. However, before the potential of the area can be realised, there are significant issues to overcome, such as managing flood risk, changing the image of the area, tackling contamination and hazards, and improving connectivity across the inner ring road.

The area also has some of the town's poorest quality housing which can be isolated and divided by major roads. Much of the built form is industrial and currently housing is a secondary use. The quality of the streets and public realm is typically poor. Issues also include the thermal performance and structural integrity of the homes. Most are terraced and have no garden; many of which have front doors directly onto the street. There is a small amount of open space in the area and what exists is of poor quality. Anti-social behaviour and fly tipping has also been raised as problems in previous public participation work.

During the preparation of the original masterplan a number of options were assessed to improve the area in terms of housing. After consultation the preferred approach was to improve the existing stock. The refurbishment of homes to bring them up to standards of performance and amenity was explored in detail when the Council commissioned architects to prepare a package of measures. Examples included installation of extra insulation, replacement windows sympathetic to the area, improvements to the street environment and the creation of garden areas where appropriate. This would allow the existing community to remain in the area and retain the existing homes and historic street pattern. This approach is also supported in the Local Plan (policy TC6).

### ***Bank Top Station***

In close proximity to the Town Centre Fringe is Darlington train station (Bank Top) which is currently undergoing a major multi-million pound redevelopment project which will see significant improvements to the existing station building and surrounding area. The project is being led by the Tees Valley Combined Authority and Network Rail. New platforms, station building, footbridge and multi storey car park will form the main basis of the scheme. This will result in improved rail services for the town and wider area. Plans also involve improvements to the west side of the station on Victoria Road to create a pedestrian concourse in front of the building entrance. The redesign will create a safer, car free entrance to the historic station and general enhancements to the area.

The development project and masterplan prepared by Tees Valley Combined Authority also involves the delivery of new high quality housing on the adjoining Cattle Mart site. This will link in with the improvements on the western side of the station which is critical to enhance the area and arrival into the town. In support of this the Cattle Mart has been allocated for housing in the Local Plan. The redevelopment of this area links in with town centre and Town Centre Fringe, given the close physical relationship and this is recognised in TVCAs masterplan. Delivering on both of these regeneration schemes, the train station and Town Centre Fringe, will bring multiple benefits to the area.



## **What we aim to achieve 2025 -2030**

### **Ensuring high quality homes in the right places**

- Continue to improve standards and conditions in the private rented sector, increasing proactive and targeted working.
- Support all owner occupiers to maintain safe and comfortable homes.
- Maintaining and improving Council owned housing stock in line with climate change legislation and internal Climate Change strategies.
- Require Healthy New Town principles in new housing developments.

### **Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change**

- Improve heat efficiency in Council housing and secure further funding to implement related measures.
- Work towards the design and build of net zero carbon Council homes.
- Require that all developments in the borough deliver good sustainable design which will help to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change.
- Encourage and support the use of renewables in all new build homes and the retrofitting of existing properties.

### **Housing regeneration and renewal**

- Continue to identify opportunities and deliver residential development on brownfield sites in the town centre.
- Improve standards in the housing stock and local environment at the Town Centre Fringe.
- Review our current brownfield sites and work with TVCA and government to take advantage funding to release sites.
- Support the major redevelopment of the train station and related housing development at the Cattle Mart.

## **Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

### **Delivering quality retirement living**

As highlighted in the introduction, the population of Darlington is ageing, following the national trend. People are generally living longer. Between the last two censuses, the average (median) age of a Darlington resident increased by two years, from 41 to 43 years of age. The borough has a slightly higher average age than the North East as a whole in 2021 (42 years) and a higher average age than England (40 years). The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by just under 2,400 (an increase of 11.7%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 2,400 (10.5% decrease). In 2021 approximately 20.4% of the Darlington population was over 65 whereas in 2011 it was approximately 17.4%, indicating a rise of 3% in this age category.

Data from the SHMA also shows a substantial increase in the older population during the Local Plan period 2016 – 2036. The population aged 75+ is likely to increase by around 6,046 persons. It is important to plan for housing which is suitable for this increase in older people within the population. A key requirement being to predict the type of housing which will best meet their needs.

The SHMA also makes an assessment of the demand for specialist older person housing products for those aged 75 or over, taking into account current stock, unmet demand and population growth. The provision of specialist accommodation will form an important part of the overall housing mix in the borough. A substantial need of just under 2,300 specialist older person additional housing units over the plan period are identified. This level of provision is unlikely to be achievable in full. However, we will work with both registered providers and private developers to increase the proportion of older person's accommodation within residential developments.

It is also acknowledged that it is not necessarily through specialist provision that the need will be met for older people, solutions can also be found from general housing and many older people may not want or need specialist accommodation or care. The aim is to shift away from a reliance on residential care homes to offer people a choice of support and care at home. Also exploring alternative models of care delivery and accommodation which promote independence.

Government policy is also focused on supporting older people and those with a disability to live independently at home. Supporting independent living can help reduce the costs to health and social services and providing more housing options for older people can free up homes which are under occupied. Meeting these needs is a challenge, however providing more accessible and easily adaptable homes will help people maintain independence for longer. It is for this reason that we have introduced standards in the Local Plan for accessible and adaptable homes. These standards are part of the optional technical requirements which exceed the minimum standards required by building regulations. A percentage of the total number of dwellings on housing developments are required to meet the higher standards (details can be found in policy H4 of the Local Plan).

The Council understands there are particular housing needs of older people and is therefore involved in the provision of a number of housing options for people over 55. The table below provides a breakdown of the type of over 55's accommodation we have currently.

### Council Over 55's accommodation

Type	Number	Bedrooms
Extra Care	113	1 & 2-bed apartments
Sheltered Schemes	242	1-bed apartments
Good Neighbour Properties	350	1-bed apartments

We operate three extra care schemes in the borough, Dalkeith House, Oban Court and Rosemary Court, but also work in partnership with Anchor Housing to provide a fourth scheme at Mayflower Court. This type of housing comprises of self-contained flats to rent with a range of communal facilities, warden services and on-site care.

The Council also offers sheltered housing for rent. These are one-bedroom apartments and bungalows with communal areas, social opportunities, scheme management support and everyday reassurance. Sheltered accommodation provide support but at a lower level in comparison to Extra Care, and residents live more independently. Another option is good neighbour accommodation which has a greater focus on a person's independence. These one-bedroom apartments are self-contained but have the benefit of a scheme manager and other support for emergencies. The difference is that the properties are not all under one roof like sheltered or extra care. Each scheme has a community centre close by where the scheme manager is located, and daily activities are provided.

More generally the Council also works with and provides support to private sector developers who are delivering accommodation for the elderly.

### **Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs**

Housing and the care and support of people are often interrelated. As a Council we will need to consider the diverse needs of all people in our communities to ensure they live independently for as long as possible. Working with residents, the voluntary sector and other partners to understand how we tackle complex housing issues is essential. The Care Act (2014) is clear that housing is a health and social care related service as it plays a vital role in supporting people to maintain good health and quality of life. Its key focus is supporting people to live independently at home.

Adult Social Care work towards a strength-based framework, which focusses on supporting the person to draw on their own strengths and assets, with support if required to enable a person to remain as independent as possible. This in turn is reinforced by our "home first" approach to support people to remain in their own homes or return home after an intervention. However, we need to explore what other options would strengthen this approach and reduce reliance on residential care.

Increasing housing options for people with care and support needs remains an important priority for the Council. Adult social care in Darlington is also experiencing significant pressures including increasing demand for support, complexity of needs, rising costs, workforce challenges and social care reforms. Data also indicates that Darlington's population is living longer but not healthier and there are particular issues that are significantly worse than national averages.

There are a number of ways in which the Council support residents in their own homes via a range of services. Some of which we deliver directly, whilst others are provided by specific companies. However, the Adult Social Care Team can assist in terms of assessing what support you may need and whether you are eligible for social care funded financial support. The types of services available are listed below and can assist a range of vulnerable people. Full details can be found on the Council's website <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/adult-services/living-independently/>

- *Home care services*
- *Rapid Response*
- *Adaptions and equipment*
- *Lifeline and telecare services*
- *Assistive Technology*
- *Reablement service*

These services are invaluable and aim to support residents to live independently in their own homes for longer. For example, Lifeline ensures residents have the security of knowing you can always get help if you need it. Support workers can be first responders to incidents, providing assistance even before emergency services arrive. We provide the Lifeline service to 1690 Council properties and to 1417 private homes. Lifeline attended 9312 emergency callouts in 2022/2023, highlighting the demand and importance of this type of support.

Each year, Housing Services also complete a range of minor and major adaptions to individual Council properties where a need has been identified by an Occupational Therapist. Works range from the provision of lever taps and grab rails to semi-permanent ramps, stair lifts, hoists and ground floor extensions.

Adaptations play a fundamental role in supporting vulnerable people to continue to live independently reducing the need for expensive care packages and prevent a premature move into residential or care accommodation. They can also be financed through Disabled Facilities Grant. A range of needs have also been considered in developing our new build housing programme and properties are built in accordance with Lifetime Homes standards.

The Council also offers short term support or intervention for people leaving hospital including reablement to allow people to regain or gain new skills. This provides support and reduces the need for premature or long term stays in residential care.

Digital technologies have a role to play in managing the demand for care and support services with the potential to maximise independence, improve outcomes and provide financial benefits. The Council has launched a Digital Darlington Strategy <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/22279/digital-darlington-strategy-2025-30.pdf> which sets out a vision for digital capabilities that meet the range of needs of our communities. There is also a separate Adult Social Care Digital Strategy <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/adult-services/darlington-digital-strategy/>

Digital tools can provide better access to information to make choices about care, assists with engagement, allows access to records and can have many benefits for support staff. It is about enabling and encouraging those who can use digital and online tools to do so but it is not about replacing our services with digital only options.

In terms of accommodation, as well as the models discussed linked to retirement living there are a number of other options with care and support in Darlington, including:

- Housing Related Support – including accommodation with care and support for people at risk of homelessness and people who have experienced domestic abuse
- Supported Living
- Intermediate Care, Respite and Short Stay beds
- Residential Care

Adult Social Care prioritise safeguarding actions under the Care Act. Working in partnership with local agencies including health, housing and providers of services for people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. This involves co ordinating short- and longer-term support including within housing options and reducing the risk of homelessness.

Supported living describes housing that includes the care and support people need to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. This type of accommodation is mostly used by people with learning disabilities and/or mental health conditions and can be shared or single tenancies within a complex of properties. Supported housing provides crucial help to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. It can have an enormous positive impact on an individual's quality of life; from their physical and mental health to their engagement with the community. Supported accommodation is largely provided in Darlington as Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) or a house with support.

The Council and health partners also purchase a number of intermediate, short break stay and respite beds from service providers in Darlington to ensure appropriate support services are provided to people after leaving hospital or when they are at risk of being sent to hospital. In 2022/23, 369 people were placed in short break stays (332 older people and 37 working aged adults). This number has seen a large increase since 2017/18 when 279 people were supported in this way (249 older people and 30 working aged adults). Intermediate care helps people to avoid going into hospital unnecessarily and helps people to be as independent as possible.

Residential care also assists in meeting accommodation needs in the borough. Residents usually live in single rooms with access to 24 hour on-site care and support. This type of service can provide care to older people and working aged adults with a learning and/or physical disability or people with mental health issue. Within Darlington there are 20 residential care homes for older people, 19 of which are contracted under a Council framework agreement. For younger adults we currently have 37 properties with 7 on framework providers and also have people placed with 13 off framework providers.

More generally, good quality design is essential and specific standards for any proposed supported and specialist accommodation should be discussed and agreed with local authority commissioners. Specific guidance, requirements and design principles are set out in the Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy (2024). Future commissioning intentions for providers are also set out for the different accommodation types in the strategy.

The Adult Social Care Market Position Statement and Commissioning Strategy (2024/25) is also relevant and sets out our understanding of demand for care and support services and how that demand may change over time. The document outlines current supply issues and some of the major challenges facing the borough.

Overall, it is key that people have a clear and accessible overview of what care and support is available. Explaining basic housing rights and options and where people might go to get more information for different types of housing related concerns and needs. It is essential the Council and partners can provide this.

## **Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing**

Since 2015, the Council has successfully focused on homelessness prevention. This has been reinforced through national legislation and there is a statutory duty on Councils to prevent homelessness. We recognise the devastating impacts that homelessness can have on people's lives and that the best way we can help those people is to avoid them getting into that position.

In the past, the numbers found sleeping rough in Darlington in any year have generally been low in comparison to the major urban areas. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has continued to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless and Housing Options services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for emergency accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.

As well as the pressures created since the pandemic, the lifting of the ban on section 21 ("no fault") evictions in June 2021 has also created an increase in homeless presentations and requests for housing advice. In 2023-24, we received 1,357 homeless presentations to the Housing Options service, compared to 835 in 2019-20, an increase of 63%.

The use of temporary and emergency accommodation has also increased over the last few years and in some cases alternative accommodation has to be found. Our approach to dealing with homeless clients is unchanged in that every person matters and can, with the appropriate intervention, move from rough sleeping into long-term, sustainable accommodation.

The Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 sets out that every resident in Darlington should have a secure, affordable place to call home. It is important that the right support is in place at the right time and where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent. The Council will work in partnership with other organisations to end homelessness in Darlington. We recognise that it is a complex issue and innovative responses are required.

The Council's Housing Options Team are the key point of contact if a person is or could become homeless. They will assess a person's current housing situation and will work out what their needs are, giving advice and support. The emphasis on prevention has enabled the Council's Housing Options team to find solutions for those seeking help that has meant that comparatively few people have had to go to the stage of making a homeless application. Details on the services provided for homelessness can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/homelessness/>

It is not unusual for applicants to be faced with multiple problems, such as financial issues due to unemployment, mental health issues, behavioural problems and addiction. In developing a solution that is lasting there may well be a need for other, non-housing services to become involved in finding a path for the applicant that will resolve the homelessness risk. The Council offers housing related support services for those at risk of homelessness which covers wider issues.

This has been an ongoing challenge for the Housing Options Team, finding suitable accommodation and support for those individuals with complex needs. Despite this, over the last couple of years we have recruited specialist housing officers to assist with mental health and domestic abuse needs. We have also linked up with public health to fast-track clients into drug and alcohol services and to more generally support the sleeping rough agenda. Four empty properties have also been purchased and refurbished to provide 8 units of temporary accommodation.

From a successful bid for funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative we have also funded an Outreach Support Worker and recruited a Housing Options Navigator. Roles that support and prevent people from sleeping rough. A Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator, has also been appointed, working across the Tees Valley to support Local Authorities in delivering their homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, coordinating rough sleeper counts and analysing data and returns for Government.

More generally, the Council and our partners are committed to extending as much choice as possible to those households who require affordable rented accommodation. This is largely done through the choice-based lettings scheme discussed earlier in the strategy. The Council will ensure that the needs of residents, particularly the most vulnerable, are prioritised and the choice and access to appropriate accommodation is maximised.

### **Minimising the impacts of welfare reform**

Central Government changes to the welfare system have impacted on individuals on low incomes, local authorities and registered providers. In Darlington, Universal Credit (UC) went live in June 2018 and as of February 2025, approximately 2,360 Council tenants are in receipt of some element of UC. Sanctions are harder on UC in comparison to those on older style welfare benefits.

Managed migration to UC is rolling out across the country and is due to be completed by March 2026. In 2025, the process will move residents who receive Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) onto UC, which can only be applied for online. As such the numbers of public PCs were increased in the Town Hall to allow customers to use these for free to apply.

Housing Services has a dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Team who work with Council tenants around their UC claim. They offer advice, guidance and budgeting support. Other Registered Providers have similar teams to assist their tenants and Citizens Advice provide telephone and face to face support for those unable to complete forms online. The Council also support individuals with Discretionary Housing Payments and the Homeless Prevention Grant, which can assist with rent shortfalls and deposits.

## **What we aim to achieve 2025 -2030**

### **Delivering quality retirement living**

- Work with developers to maximise adaptable and accessible homes standards (M4 2 & 3) in new housing developments.
- Increase the proportion of older person's accommodation within residential developments.

### **Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs**

- Adult Social Care to continue to provide support through various means so people can live independently at home.
- Adapt more properties and assist people to access such properties.
- Identify, implement and support the use of new assistive technology, including digital technology, to assist residents to remain independent in their own homes.
- Work with partners to develop supported housing schemes for vulnerable people.

### **Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing**

- The Housing Options Team will continue to support and provide information to those people who are homeless or are threatened by homelessness.
- Review Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated actions.

### **Minimising the impacts of welfare reform**

- Assist with online welfare applications by prioritising public access to IT equipment through libraries and Council buildings.
- Continue to provide advice to Council tenants on Universal Credit, signposting to relevant welfare and advice agencies as appropriate
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Support Fund where appropriate to assist those in the most financial need.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Actions: What we aim to achieve 2025 – 2030**

#### **Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

##### **Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents**

- Deliver a minimum of 492 net additional homes per annum.
- Work with developers to remove barriers to housing delivery, particularly on Local Plan housing allocations.
- Work with developers and partners to bring forward the garden village sites at Skerningham & Greater Faverdale.
- Review the brownfield land register.
- Work with partners such as TVCA on funding bids such as the Brownfield Housing Fund and the Brownfield Land Release Fund.
- Review the Local Plan and associated evidence base, such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, when required.

##### **Ensuring a suitable housing mix**

- Ensure development schemes provide an appropriate mix of housing in terms of type, size and tenure.
- Explore opportunities via the Council's house building programme and joint venture arrangements to deliver an appropriate mix of homes and retirement living.
- Maintain and promote the custom and self-build register and linking up those interested with permissioned sites.

##### **Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent**

- Continue to progress the Council's new build housing developments and explore opportunities for new sites.
- Maximise the delivery of social rent homes through Council led schemes.
- Develop opportunities to deliver new Council homes in schemes led by others.
- The purchase and lease of additional houses to use as temporary accommodation and homes for social rent.
- Ensure opportunities for current Council tenants and prospective tenants are easily available to apply for affordable homes that meet their needs.
- Identify opportunities to provide low cost home ownership properties in new build Council housing.
- Require between 10% and 30% affordable housing (on-site) on all appropriate market housing developments, in line with Local Plan policy.

- Secure the correct tenure split of affordable housing on market led schemes, as required by Local Plan policy.
- Work with partners to maximise the delivery of grant funded affordable housing in the borough.
- Organise an annual housing conference.

### **Helping First Time Buyers**

- Continue to promote the Council's low-cost home ownership homes (Council owned properties).
- Require 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations should be first homes.
- Require the appropriate proportion of affordable home ownership products on market schemes in line with Local Plan policy.

### **Promoting Modern Methods of Construction**

- Explore opportunities for MMC in all developments, Council and private.
- Work with partners to develop and deliver MMC.

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.**

- Continue to monitor traveller accommodation via the annual caravan count.
- Review the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

## **Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

### **Ensuring high quality homes in the right places**

- Continue to improve standards and conditions in the private rented sector, increasing proactive and targeted working.
- Support all owner occupiers to maintain safe and comfortable homes.
- Maintaining and improving Council owned housing stock in line with climate change legislation and internal Climate Change strategies.
- Require Healthy New Town principles in new housing developments.

### **Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change**

- Improve heat efficiency in Council housing and secure further funding to implement related measures.
- Work towards the design and build of net zero carbon Council homes.
- Require that all developments in the borough deliver good sustainable design which will help to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change.
- Encourage and support the use of renewables in all new build homes and the retrofitting of existing properties.

## **Housing regeneration and renewal**

- Continue to identify opportunities and deliver residential development on brownfield sites in the town centre.
- Improve standards in the housing stock and local environment at the Town Centre Fringe.
- Review our current brownfield sites and work with TVCA and government to take advantage funding to release sites.
- Support the major redevelopment of the train station and related housing development at the Cattle Mart.

## **Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

### **Delivering quality retirement living**

- Work with developers to maximise adaptable and accessible homes standards (M42 & 3) in new housing developments.
- Increase the proportion of older person's accommodation within residential developments.

### **Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs**

- Adult Social Care to continue to provide support through various means so people can live independently at home.
- Adapt more properties and assist people to access such properties.
- Identify, implement and support the use of new assistive technology, including digital technology, to assist residents to remain independent in their own homes.
- Work with partners to develop supported housing schemes for vulnerable people.

### **Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing**

- The Housing Options Team will continue to support and provide information to those people who are homeless or are threatened by homelessness.
- Review Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated actions.

### **Minimising the impacts of welfare reform**

- Assist with online welfare applications by prioritising public access to IT equipment through libraries and Council buildings.
- Continue to provide advice to Council tenants on Universal Credit, signposting to relevant welfare and advice agencies as appropriate.
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Support Fund where appropriate to assist those in the most financial need.

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**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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**PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF AN ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION TO CONTROL THE CHANGES OF USE  
FROM A DWELLING TO A SMALL HOUSE OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (BETWEEN 3-6  
RESIDENTS)**

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

**Responsible Director -  
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval of Cabinet to start the legal process of introducing a Boroughwide Article 4 Direction which would remove the permitted development rights, which allow the change of use from Use Class C3 (dwelling house) to Use Class C4 (small house of multiple occupation between three and six unrelated individuals).

**Summary**

2. Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) form part of the borough's privately rented housing provision, contributing to people's housing choices. This form of accommodation is generally more affordable and flexible than other housing types and therefore suitable for younger people and other households that are not living as families. As well as reducing housing costs for individuals, sharing homes can also have positive social benefits for occupiers, helping individuals, especially young people, to form new networks and relationships.
3. However, due to the nature of the accommodation they provide, unless they are properly planned and managed, HMOs can create issues.
4. Currently the change of use from a dwelling to a small house of multiple occupation (one with three - six unrelated individuals) does not require planning permission. Changes of use to larger HMOs (one with more than six unrelated individuals) does require planning consent. The introduction of an Article 4 Direction would result in planning permission being required for those smaller changes of use.
5. It is considered pertinent to introduce a boroughwide Article 4 Direction as the introduction on a smaller geographical area may result in the issues currently being encountered pushed to other areas within the Borough.

## **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that:-

- (a) The Council indicate their intention to introduce a non-immediate Article 4 Direction to remove the permitted development rights to change a C3 dwelling to a C4 HMO in Darlington.
- (b) If, after the period stated in the notice by which representations may be made (at least 42 days from the date of the notice), no representations objecting to the Article 4 Direction have been received that the Director of Economy and Public Protection is given delegated powers to confirm the Article 4 Direction 12 months following the publication of the notice. If representations objecting to the Article 4 Direction are received then the matter will be brought back to Cabinet for further consideration.
- (c) Supplementary planning guidance is prepared to assist property owners, planning applicants, planning officers and elected councillors in preparing, commenting on and determining planning applications.

## **Delegations**

7. That if, after the period stated in the notice by which representations may be made (at least 42 days from the date of the notice), no representations objecting to the Article 4 Direction have been received that the Director of Economy and Public Protection is given delegated powers to confirm the Article 4 Direction 12 months following the publication of the notice.

## **Reasons**

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

- (a) There has been an increase in the number of HMOs and some concerns have been raised about the quality of accommodation they provide and their concentration within certain locations.
- (b) The introduction of an Article 4 Direction will enable the Council to control the location and quality of new HMOs. This will help deliver the Council aspiration of providing quality, affordable housing for all. It would also provide more information on their whereabouts.
- (c) Not to introduce an Article 4 Direction was rejected as a recommendation as it would mean the Council had little control or influence on the establishment of new HMOs, and it is not considered in the best interests of ensuring the delivery of good quality affordable housing for all.
- (d) The introduction of an immediate Article 4 Direction was rejected as an option as it would open the Council up to challenge and potential compensation claims. In addition, it would not allow for effective consultation and engagement on the introduction of Supplementary Planning Guidance to guide new HMO development.

**Trevor Watson**  
**Executive Director – Economy and Public Protection**

**Background Papers**

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

David Hand : Extension 6294

Council Plan	Delivering affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents. Creating safer, healthier and more engaged communities
Addressing inequalities	Ensuring there is adequate accommodation for all
Tackling Climate Change	N/A
Efficient and effective use of resources	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	Ensuring properties are fit for purpose for the health of residents
S17 Crime and Disorder	Controlling the proliferation of HMOs in locations and thereby reducing the possibility of anti-social behaviour
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	N/A
Budget and Policy Framework	Minimal financial impact
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	N/A

**MAIN REPORT**

**Information and Analysis**

9. A house in multiple occupation (HMO) is defined as being a property occupied by at least three people who are not from one household (such as a family) but share facilities such as a bathroom and kitchen. Such properties are commonly known as house shares or bedsits.
10. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (the 'GPDO') makes provision for granting planning permission for certain classes of development without the requirement for a planning application to be made.
11. Under the GPDO, a change of use from a house (which is in planning use class C3) to a large HMO of seven or more people (which does not fall into any of the planning use classes) requires planning permission. However, change of use from a house to a small HMO of between three and six people (which is in planning use class C4), is classed a permitted development and does not require planning permission. This means that the Council cannot currently exercise any planning control over small HMOs.

12. Since 1 October 2018 all HMOs of five or more people have also been subject to mandatory licensing. Licenses are valid for five years and properties are subject to an inspection during this period. If the Council receives complaints regarding a property this will prompt a further inspection and enforcement action may be taken.
13. The existing housing stock in Darlington, especially around the Town Centre and Hospital lends itself to the conversion to small HMOs, but this does not stop new builds being converted as well. One of the issues is that because the conversion to small HMOs does not require planning consent, in most cases does not require building regulations and are outside the licensing regime, we do not know exactly how many HMOs exist in the Borough.
14. More recently, Members have raised concerns about the growth in HMOs in various areas and residents are raising concerns specifically about the number of HMOs in the Greenbank Road area of the town. The Council is often only notified of HMOs where they are raising local issues.

#### **Article 4 Directions**

15. Article 4 of the GPDO allows for local planning authorities to remove most of the permitted development rights. There are two types of Article 4 Direction that can be made:
  - (a) Immediate Article 4 Direction – in order to introduce an immediate Article 4 Direction, the local planning authority must consider that the development to which the direction relates would be immediately prejudicial to the proper planning of their area or constitute a threat to the amenities of their area. The Council may be liable to pay compensation for abortive work or other losses associated with the removal of permitted development rights; and
  - (b) Non-immediate Article 4 Direction – this is the more common route for making an Article 4 Directions. To avoid compensation payments, a local planning authority can confirm and publish its intention to make the Direction at least 12 months, and not more than two years, ahead of the Article 4 taking effect.
16. An Article 4 Direction could, therefore, be used by the Council to remove permitted development rights for the conversion of dwelling houses to a small HMOs and require them to be considered through the planning system in the same manner as large HMOs. It would give the Council greater opportunity to manage the overall number of HMOs in the area and mitigate some of the issues attributed to their concentration. It is recommended that a non-immediate Article 4 Direction be pursued, to minimise the financial exposure of the Council.
17. It's important to note that an Article 4 Direction would not ban development of HMOs; it would simply mean that, regardless of size, they would require planning permission.



## **Justification for introducing an Article 4 Direction**

18. HMOs provide a form of low-cost housing, particularly for students, younger people and people on low incomes. They provide flexible accommodation for people with short-term housing requirements. This includes people in-between properties, people employed on short-term contracts and people who are saving to purchase a home. They also provide housing for people that simply prefer to live with large numbers of other people, such as friendship groups. Given the limited number of purpose-built private rented property in the borough, the sector will be reliant on conversion of existing properties.
19. Notwithstanding their importance in meeting housing needs, poor quality HMOs, or an over-concentration of them, can have significant negative impacts and have caused concern to local residents and Members. These concerns include: transient populations; anti-social behaviour; noise and nuisance; changing character of an area; living conditions and property standards; impact on parking and highways; mismanagement of waste; and poorly maintained properties and gardens. This can impact the lives of their sometimes more vulnerable occupants and their surrounding neighbourhoods. In addition, landlords are often better placed to acquire properties than local families, thus undermining the ability of larger family households to meet their needs.
20. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the use of Article 4 Directions should be limited to where it is necessary to protect local amenity or the well-being of the area and in all cases should be evidence based and apply to the smallest geographical area possible. The Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) advises that Article 4 Directions should be limited to situations where it is necessary to protect local amenity or the well-being of the area. The potential harm that the Article 4 Direction is intended to address will need to be clearly identified, and there will need to be a particularly strong justification for the withdrawal of permitted development rights relating to a wide area within the planning authority.
21. The majority of the housing stock in the Borough could be easily converted into three and four bedroom HMOs, this is not confined to the urban area of Darlington and could include new build as well as existing stock. As previously mentioned, the introduction of an Article 4 Direction is not intended to refuse applications but to ensure the accommodation is appropriate for the welfare of the residents and so that it would not cause issues in the surrounding area.
22. Whilst carrying out a search on just one website, it revealed 116 entries for properties advertising spare rooms in the Darlington area. The majority of available rooms were in the Bank Top and Hospital area of the town, but it also identified availability across the Borough including Hurworth and Middleton St George. It must be stressed that was just the interrogation of one website and only of properties which had availability.
23. Analysis indicates that there are a wide distribution of HMOs across the borough, although there appears to be areas of notable concentrations. The evidence has also demonstrated that the borough has greatest need for the delivery of two, three, and four bed homes. In the Private Ownership and Rented sectors this need is highest in respect of three-bedroom dwellings (50%), followed by two-bedroom dwellings (32%). The introduction of a borough wide Article 4 would ensure that the Local Planning Authority are better equipped to manage the location and proliferation of HMO's across the borough to ensure

that the overall housing needs are not detrimentally impacted in certain areas through loss of family sized accommodation.

24. Whilst the advice in the NPPF and the PPG is that an Article 4 Direction should apply to the smallest geographical area possible, the nature of this Article 4 Direction is that it is to ensure that properties are adequate for the wellbeing of occupants and the amenity of the neighbourhood. The identification of a geographical area may push the issue into other areas, so the recommendation is that it is a Borough Wide Article 4 Direction.
25. Research has shown that over 100 local authorities in England have issued Article 4 Directions in relation to HMOs and increasingly these are Borough Wide. Advice from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is that an Article 4 Direction can be applied at any time, without the necessity of waiting for an issue to arise.

### **Planning Policy**

26. Whilst Policy H 8 of the current Local Plan gives some guidance on matters that should be considered when dealing with planning applications for changes of use to HMOs it is considered it is prudent to issue further advice in the form of a Supplementary Planning Document and to be included in the forthcoming review of the Local Plan.

### **Next Steps**

27. In order to make an Article 4 Direction, a public notice specifying the date the direction will come into force will need to be made. The Council must advertise the notice of making in the local press (i.e. the Northern Echo) and provide a minimum of 21 days for representations to be made by members of the public. The notice must also be displayed in at least two locations in the area to be covered by the direction for at least six weeks. Given the significant number of properties affected, it is considered impracticable to serve individual notice of the Article 4 Direction on owners and occupiers. Under the GPDO we do not, therefore, need to serve such notice. However, in order to ensure that the consultation is exhaustive and robust and to maximise the reach of the consultation in recognition of the proposed Borough wide geography, it is intended to provide an advertisement period of 42 days rather than the statutory 21.
28. A copy of the Article 4 Direction and notice of making must also be sent to the Secretary of State on the same date the notice is published or displayed. The Secretary of State does not have to approve Article 4 Directions and will only intervene when there are clear reasons for doing so. The Secretary of State has the power to modify or cancel Article 4 Directions at any time before or after they are made but will not use their powers unless there are clear reasons why intervention at this level is necessary.
29. The Council must consider any representations that are received when deciding whether or not to confirm the direction. If a decision is taken to confirm the direction, notice of confirmation will need to be prepared and again advertised in the Northern Echo and the Council's website, and displayed and a copy of the confirmed direction sent to the Secretary of State.

### **Financial Implications**

30. Legal work to undertake the Article 4 Direction including the required press and site notices. The use of a non-immediate Direction reduces the risk of claims for compensation

### **Legal Implications**

31. The decision to make an Article 4 Direction can be subject to judicial review proceedings. If the proceedings are successful, the Article 4 Direction could be quashed. A claim for Judicial Review must be made within six weeks of the notice (unless leave is granted by the Court for an application to be made out of time) and can be made on the grounds of illegality, irrationality or procedural unfairness. In making a decision related to Planning the Council must ensure that it gives proper and full consideration of the provisions of the NPPF and the PPG. Those provisions are set out in paragraph 20 of this report.

### **Consultation**

32. Consultation will be carried out in accordance with the procedural guidance within the General Permitted Development Order, albeit with an extended period allowed for comments to be received. Consultation on Supplementary Planning Guidance will be carried out in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

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**CABINET  
8 JULY 2025**

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## **UPDATED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT – PART 1 (LOCAL PLAN)**

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

**Responsible Director –  
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To seek Members' approval to refer an updated version of its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan) to Full Council for adoption.

#### **Summary**

2. A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how Local Planning Authorities will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents (DPD's) or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).
3. Authorities are required to review their SCI's at least every five years. The Darlington SCI – Part 1 was last reviewed in August 2020 with temporary updates made to reflect national COVID 19 pandemic restrictions.
4. The update will remove these restrictions and allow some other minor updates to be consulted on prior to the statutory consultation periods on the Local Plan Review. An updated Design of New Development Supplementary (SPD) will also be prepared and consulted upon alongside the review of the Local Plan in line with the content of the updated SCI.
5. Cabinet approved an updated draft of the SCI Part 1 for consultation on 8 April 2025. This consultation was held between 29 April 2025 and 30 May 2025. Six responses were received none of which raised significant concerns in relation to the content of the Updated SCI Part 1.

## **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that Cabinet agree that the Updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan) be referred to Full Council for adoption.

## **Reasons**

7. The recommendation is supported as the Council is required to have an up-to-date SCI as part of the plan review process.

**Trevor Watson**  
**Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

## **Background Papers**

- (i) National Planning Policy Framework, December 2025
- (ii) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- (iii) Town and Country Planning Act (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- (iv) Localism Act 2011

David Nelson: Extension 6291

<p>Council Plan</p>	<p>The Local Plan and supporting documents are integral to the delivery of the Council Plan and its priorities (adopted by Council in July 2024).</p> <p>The priorities are:</p> <p>ECONOMY - building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.</p> <p>The Local Plan allocates land for employment sufficient to meet the future needs of the borough.</p> <p>HOMES – affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents.</p> <p>The Local Plan allocates sufficient land to meet the boroughs needs, sets affordable housing requirements and ensures new developments are well planned, safe and attractive.</p> <p>LIVING WELL – a healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most.</p> <p>The existing Local Plan encourages development to consider health and wellbeing with a requirement for larger developments to undertake a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). Allowance is also made for older people’s accommodation and sets a requirement for adaptable homes.</p> <p>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations.</p> <p>The Local Plan contains a mechanism to secure contributions to education provision and secure sites for new provision in key locations.</p> <p>COMMUNITIES – working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities.</p> <p>The Local Plan throughout has a focus on delivering cohesive communities rather than individual developments.</p> <p>LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – a well-connected, clean and sustainable borough.</p> <p>The Local Plan contains numerous policies to protect both the natural and built environment.</p>
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Addressing inequalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment will be part of the plan and SPD review and process.
Tackling Climate Change	<p>Achieving sustainable development is a fundamental objective of the Local Plan. The early review of the existing Local Plan will enable the council to develop additional policy to tackle climate change matters, reflect updated national policy and improve existing policies where necessary.</p> <p>The reviewed plan will need to be supported by an updated Sustainability Appraisal which will consider climate change in greater detail.</p>
Efficient and effective use of resources	The council has to have an up to date plan this necessitates a review at least every five years. This includes review of the SCI.
Health and Wellbeing	A key objective of Local Plan and supporting documents is to improve people's health and wellbeing by protecting and improving the economic, social and environmental conditions in the Borough.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The Local Plan has a role in reducing crime through the promotion of good design and location of development.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no proposed changes to the Council's budget or policy framework in this report.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The Updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) – Part 1 (Local Plans), attached at **Appendix 1**, is a statutory requirement. SCI's set out how Local planning authorities will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents (DPD's) or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).
9. Government guidance stipulates that:



*Local planning authorities must review their SCI's every 5 years from their adoption date. It is important that SCI's are kept up-to-date to ensure effective community involvement at all stages of the planning process. Therefore, a local planning authority should regularly review and update their Statement of Community Involvement to reflect any changes to engagement.*

*A local planning authority may review and update their Statement of Community Involvement at the same time as reviewing and updating a plan to reflect what action is taken to involve the community in any change to the plan.*

10. The Darlington SCI – Part 1 (Local Plans) was last updated in August 2020 with some temporary updates made to reflect national COVID 19 pandemic restrictions. This update will remove restrictions and allow some other minor updates to be consulted on prior to the statutory consultation periods on the Local Plan Review.
11. The SCI sets out the General principles to our planning consultations/engagement. These are:
  - (a) We will communicate clearly;
  - (b) We will make it easy for you to be involved;
  - (c) We will make sure your involvement is effective;
  - (d) We will share information and provide feedback;
  - (e) We will keep the process simple;
  - (f) We will learn from our mistakes.
12. The SCI also sets out in more detail:
  - (a) When we will consult;
  - (b) Who we will consult;
  - (c) How we will consult;
  - (d) Details of how we will communicate with respondents;
  - (e) How decisions will be made;
  - (f) Where documents will be made available; and
  - (g) How we can be contacted.
13. There are also some details around Duty to Cooperate with other Local Planning Authorities and public bodies with an interest in land use and development in the Borough along with a reiteration of the Council's support role in the preparation of any Neighbourhood Plans.
14. The changes to the SCI are minor and primarily relate to:
  - (a) Removal of temporary COVID related restrictions;
  - (b) Updates to reflect Equalities Act;
  - (c) Updates to 'Specific Consultation Bodies' (e.g. Highways England is now National Highways);

- (d) Information will be hosted on the main corporate website rather than a separate 'Local Plan Microsite'.

- 15. It should be noted that the Council's SCI – Part 2 (Planning Applications) is not part of this review.

### **Financial Implications**

- 16. The SCI has been reviewed by the Planning Policy team with no direct additional costs other than officer time.

### **Legal Implications**

- 17. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

### **Consultation**

- 18. Cabinet approved an updated draft of the SCI Part 1 for consultation on 8 April 2025. This consultation was held between 29 April 2025 and 30 May 2025. Everyone on our existing Local Plan Consultation Database were informed directly and information provided online.
- 19. In total six responses were received; two from statutory consultees Historic England and Natural England confirming they had no comments to make on the document. The remaining four were from residents.
- 20. Of these responses from residents, most indicated broad support for the consultation methods, although some did express concern with an overreliance on using the council website to communicate information. This is however in line with the Governments ongoing commitment to make information freely available in digital formats. As part of this we will look to make our documents available in different formats upon request to ensure that our local plan consultations are accessible to all.
- 21. A number of points raised related to Part 2 of the SCI regarding consultation on planning applications. This part of the SCI is not currently under review.
- 22. As a result of the consultation no changes are deemed necessary to the SCI but a number of the points raised have been noted and will be considered when individual engagement plans are produced for specific pieces of work. We have also been looking into specific ways to deliver alternative formats of consultation documents, this included fulfilling a request for an audio document for this consultation.



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT  
(Part 1) THE LOCAL PLAN**

**Draft for Adoption  
July 2025**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (Part 1) sets out how Darlington Borough Council will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents' (DPD's) or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).
- 1.2 It has been updated to help shape the review of the Local Plan. It replaces the previous SCI (Part 1) issued in August 2020.

## **2. General principles**

- 2.1 We will always apply some general principles to our planning consultations / engagement. These are set out below:
  - a) We will communicate clearly;
  - b) We will make it easy for you to be involved;
  - c) We will make sure your involvement is effective;
  - d) We will share information and provide feedback;
  - e) We will keep the process simple;
  - f) We will learn from our mistakes.
- 2.2 Involvement in consultations will be open to all, including all protected characteristics listed within The Equality Act 2010.
- 2.3 If you have difficulty in communicating with us, we will make information available in other formats such as braille, large print audio, audio description or another language on request.
- 2.4 Wherever possible, consultation will be carried out alongside other community engagement initiatives.

## **3. When will we consult?**

- 3.1 The Local Planning Regulations state that there must be a minimum of two consultation periods for Local Development Documents (including Local Plans). The first consultation relates to the issues and options that the Local Development Document should address (Regulation 18), and the second consultation should take place prior to the submission of the Local Development Document to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public (Regulation 19).
- 3.2 In addition to the statutory consultees, the Council will ensure that local communities, businesses and key stakeholders can be involved throughout the preparation of the Local Plan. The means of doing this will be set out in separate Engagement Plans.
- 3.3 Supplementary Planning Documents will normally undergo a minimum of four weeks consultation prior to adoption by the Council.

## 4. Who will we consult?

- 4.1 The Council must conform to certain rules and regulations set by Government on how it consults. The *Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012* list 'specific consultation bodies' that we must consult with (as applicable). For Darlington Borough these are:
- a) The Coal Authority;
  - b) The Environment Agency;
  - c) Homes England;
  - d) Tees Valley Combined Authority;
  - e) The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England);
  - f) Natural England;
  - g) Network Rail Infrastructure Limited;
  - h) National Highways;
  - i) Parish Councils (including Parish Councils adjoining the borough);
  - j) Adjoining authorities;
  - k) Relevant telecommunications companies;
  - l) Clinical Commissioning Body or relevant successor;
  - m) Durham Constabulary;
  - n) Relevant electricity and gas companies;
  - o) Sewerage and water undertakers.
- (Or any equivalent successor bodies to any of the above).
- 4.2 We are also required to consult with any 'general consultation bodies' which may be affected by the contents of the document being produced. These will include:
- a) Voluntary bodies, some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the Council's area;
  - b) Bodies in the Council's area which represent the interest of different needs groups.
- 4.3 The Council will also consult 'other consultation bodies' which they consider to be appropriate and who have not fallen into the above categories, which may include:
- a) Residents Associations;
  - b) Developers and agents;
  - c) Special interest groups;
  - d) Environmental groups;
  - e) Businesses or business networks;
  - f) Educational establishments;
  - g) The general public.
- 4.4 We also hold and maintain a database of names and postal/email addresses of residents and stakeholders who have asked to be kept informed of any consultations that may come forward. An individual or an organisation may ask to be added or removed from this database at any time. In the interests of efficiency, we will assume that all those who provide an email address are happy to be contacted via this means. If you would like to be added to this database, please email us at [planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk) or write to us using the postal address in section 13 of this document.

## **5. How will we consult?**

- 5.1 Before we begin key stages of a Local Development Document, we will produce an Engagement Plan (where officers consider one to be necessary), setting out when and how we will consult/engage throughout the process. This will ensure consideration is given to the most effective way of communicating the particular issue, and that the methods engaged are proportionate.
- 5.2 The type of engagement plan will be determined depending on the nature of the issues, and those likely to be affected. For example, they could be area based if the particular issue concerns a specific site, or they could target a particular sector. Engagement plans will ensure that consultations always meet statutory requirements.
- 5.3 We will use a range of communication methods to inform individuals and organisations that a consultation is taking place, what the issues are and how they can be involved in the process. We will use the most appropriate consultation methods to ensure maximum opportunities for community involvement.
- 5.4 The Council will use different levels of community involvement as follows:
  - a) Information – Providing information through a variety of methods;
  - b) Consultation – Asking the community to provide their views about particular planning proposals at the appropriate stages;
  - c) Participation – Enabling communities and stakeholders to get involved (i.e. workshops to identify specific issues).
- 5.5 The methods that we employ to notify and involve stakeholders in the consultation process include those listed below. A bespoke combination of consultation methods will be used depending on the specific issue being considered:-
  - a) Contact appropriate organisations and individuals directly;
  - b) Publicise consultations along with relevant documents by methods such as website updates, social media, press releases, displays, etc.
  - c) Formal notices in the local media;
  - d) Consultation documents to be made available at the customer contact centre at the Town Hall (by appointment only);
  - e) Consultation documents will be made available at Crown Street and Cockerton Libraries;
  - f) Work with existing community groups or other interest groups, attend community events and joint consultations;
  - g) Consider organising events such as stakeholder meetings or workshops, including place-shaping workshops.

## **6. What you can do**

- 6.1 If you tell us that you are interested in Local Plan documents and would like to be kept informed of future consultations, we will add your details to our Consultation database. You will receive an email or letter when there is an opportunity for you to be involved, and to let you know that new documents have

been produced. If you would like your contact details to be added to our database, please contact us using the details at the end of this document. It is important that you let us know of any changes to your contact details, so that the database remains up to date.

- 6.2 To ensure that the process is transparent and so that everyone can see how our policies have developed, we need to receive all comments in writing, by email, online or by letter. If we undertake consultation events or workshops, we will make written records of views expressed at the time, so that they can also be taken into account. In order to make your comments as effective as possible, you should:-

- a) Make comments clear and concise so that we know what your main points are;
- b) Make comments within published time periods;
- c) Use the form provided, where possible. For most of our consultations we provide a comments form for you to fill in. This is not compulsory, but it can make your comments clearer and ensures we have all of the information we need;
- d) Be aware that your comments will be made publicly available on our website, and at our offices;
- e) If you are a member of a group or organisation let us know whether you are responding on your own behalf or as a member of that body.

- 6.3 The Council cannot accept anonymous comments. The Council reserves the right to not consider any representation that contains any inappropriate comments such as abusive content, offensive language or discriminatory comments. The Council will only consider comments that are relevant to the subject or theme of the consultation.

## **7. Responses to consultations – What the Council will do**

- 7.1 In response to any consultation responses the Council will:-

- a) Formally acknowledge receipt of all emails and letters;
- b) Request additional information from you where comments are not clear.

- 7.2 Consultation responses will be made publicly available on the website as soon as practicable. At the end of the consultation period, we will publish all comments received on our website. A Consultation Statement, in accordance with statutory requirements, will outline the full extent of the consultation, who was consulted, how they were consulted, and a summary of the main issues raised as a result of those consultations. This will be reported to Place Scrutiny Committee. It will then be available when the Local Plan (or other DPD) is submitted to the Secretary of State, via the website, the Town Hall (by appointment) and Crown Street or Cockerton Libraries. Comments received on Supplementary Planning Documents will be reported to the relevant committee.

- 7.3 In responding to enquiries, consultees will be referred to the Council's Planning Policy website. If the council considers an individual response is appropriate or further clarification is required then we will contact you via your preferred method of communication.

- 7.4 We will evaluate and learn from consultations and will improve our feedback

arrangements where this is required. All lessons learnt will be taken into account in the formulation of Engagement Plans for future consultations.

## **8. How will decisions be made**

- 8.1 Local Plans and other planning documents should represent a collective vision, in the context of national priorities, local circumstances and community views. To this extent, there are likely to be conflicting views about the best use of land and broader policy context. To help reduce these tensions, the Council will ensure that early and effective community engagement with stakeholders, prescribed bodies and the local community is undertaken and that everyone has an opportunity to express their views. Methods will be dependent on the planning document being prepared and the stage that the document is at, and this will always be considered carefully in the formulation of Engagement Plans.
- 8.2 Despite this, there may still be occasions when differences of opinion cannot easily be resolved. The Council will analyse comments made in response to consultations and balance different needs and opinions, including the need to conform to national policy and guidance. Based on all of the information available, officers will make a recommendation, in the form of a report to:
- a) Cabinet; and
  - b) Full Council
- 8.3 Once the recommendations have been approved by Full Council, the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents will progress to Examination in Public, whilst Supplementary Planning Documents will be adopted by the Council.

## **9. Duty to Co-operate**

- 9.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) states that local planning authorities continue to be under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries.
- 9.2 The NPPF requires strategic policy-making authorities to collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which need to be addressed within their plans. They should also engage with relevant bodies including Local Nature Partnerships, local communities, infrastructure providers, elected mayors and combined authorities (in cases where Mayors or combined authorities do not have plan making powers).
- 9.3 The Council is committed to working with other Local Planning Authorities and public bodies with an interest in land use and development in the Borough. To demonstrate effective and on-going joint working, the NPPF advises that strategic policy-making authorities should prepare statements of common ground which document the cross-boundary matters being addressed and make progress in cooperating to address these.



## **10. Neighbourhood Planning**

- 10.1 Neighbourhood planning, introduced by the Localism Act 2011, gives communities the power to agree a neighbourhood development plan, make a Neighbourhood Development Order and make a Community Right to Build Order. The framework for producing these plans and orders is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 10.2 Where local people express an interest in neighbourhood planning, the Council will support them. This will include initial advice about the process, providing details about emerging and existing Local Plan policies, and sharing other information available to the Council.
- 10.3 Further information about current Neighbourhood Areas, and support and funding for neighbourhood planning is available at:  
[www.darlington.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning) .

## **11. Availability of documents**

- 11.1 Local Development Documents and related information, including reports prepared to underpin policy preparation, will be made available on the Council's website. They will also be made available at the customer contact centre in the Town Hall (by appointment only) and at Crown Street and Cockerton libraries during specific consultation periods. At other times, these documents can be made available to view at these locations on request.
- 11.2 Paper copies, including large print and electronic versions, and any formats required as reasonable adjustments, such as braille or audio will be made available. Languages other than English can be provided on request wherever practicable and reasonable. However, a charge may be made for these.

## **12. Contacting the Council**

- 12.1 If you wish to know more about the SCI, or any aspect of planning policy, please contact us using the post or email addresses below. Information on the Local Plan, other planning policy documents and the development plan process is also available on the website.

Website: [www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy)

Email: [planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk)

Tel: 01325 406724

Planning Policy Team,  
Darlington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Feethams  
Darlington  
DL1 5QT

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**CABINET  
8 JULY 2025**

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## **CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS**

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

**Responsible Director -  
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

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## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

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

### **Summary**

2. Following Council elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040.
3. The Climate Change Officer recruited in January 2024 left service in January 2025. Recruitment for a new Climate Change Officer has taken place with the new starter joining the team in May 2025.
4. The Council's emission reduction trajectory of 40% reduction every five years is still in place. Council emissions for 2024/25 were 6,642 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e. The emissions we report are made up of the energy use in council buildings; business mileage; fleet emissions, and streetlighting and signs. We do not currently measure emissions from our supply chain or from waste.
5. Our carbon emissions for 2024/25 have increased from 2023/24. Investigations are ongoing. However, the opening of the new Hoptown Museum will have impacted on our emissions.
6. We have requested data from the Met Office on numbers of days below expected temperatures during the winter period. If there were a significant number of days, this could have impacted on the amount of gas required for heating.
7. Data on the wider Borough emissions are published by the Government in June, so this data is not yet available to us.
8. Of the 121 actions due to be reported at the end of 2024/25, 105 are on track and nine have been completed (see **Appendix 1**).

9. Following the recent motion declaring a nature restoration emergency, we will revise the climate change strategy and action plan.

### **Recommendations**

10. It is recommended that Cabinet notes the report.

### **Reasons**

11. The recommendations are 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.

**Trevor Watson**  
**Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

### **Background Papers**

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

Margaret Enstone: Extension 6229

Council Plan	<p>This report reflects the Council Plan Core Principle in Tackling Climate Change.</p> <p>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</p>
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 Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No

## MAIN REPORT

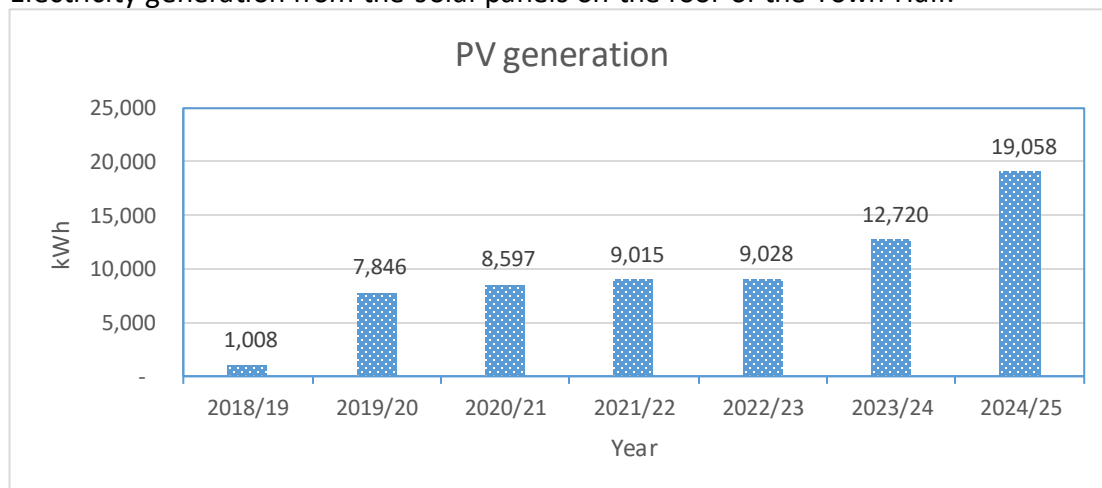
### Information and Analysis

- Following Council elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040. Further aims to increase engagement with residents and businesses were included with the intention of reducing wider borough emissions. A further commitment to monitor the Council's supply chain emissions was also added.

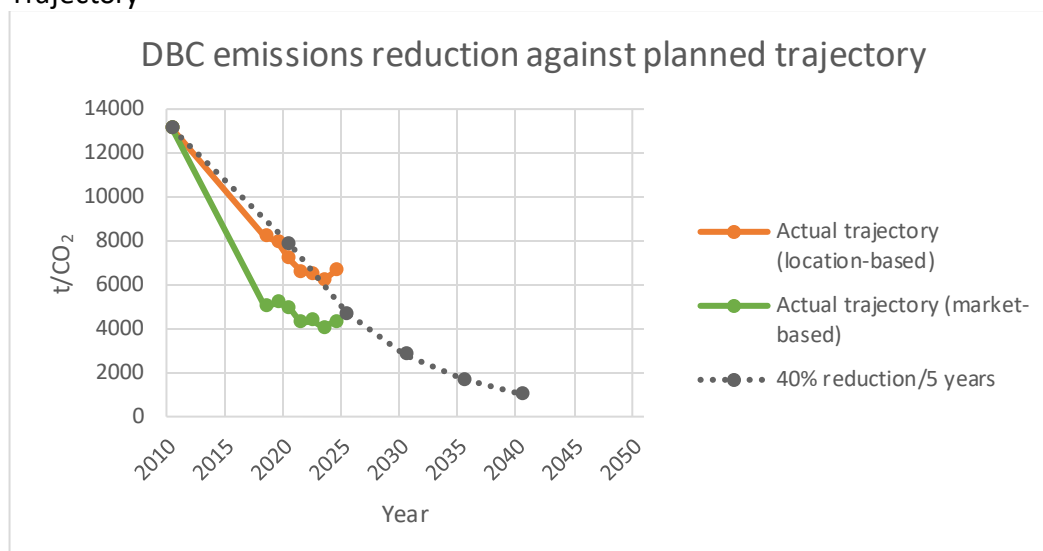
13. The Climate Change Officer recruited in January 2024 left service in January 2025. Recruitment for a new Climate Change Officer has taken place with the new starter joining the team in May 2025. For the interim period, the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer has carried out both roles, with some necessary delay in planned implementation of tasks.
14. The Council's emission reduction trajectory of 40% reduction every five years is still in place.
15. Emissions to date:

	2010/11	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>	tCO <sub>2</sub>
<b>Streetlighting</b>	3,487	759	596	515	458	412	418	418
<b>Corporate Estate</b>	7,564	5,928	5,907	5,014	4,864	4,709	4,579	4,968
<b>Business Travel</b>	2,050	1,509	1,482	1,426	1,270	1,328	1,192	1,256
<b>Water</b>	0	0		-	-	11.40	12.97	-
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>	<b>6,642</b>

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

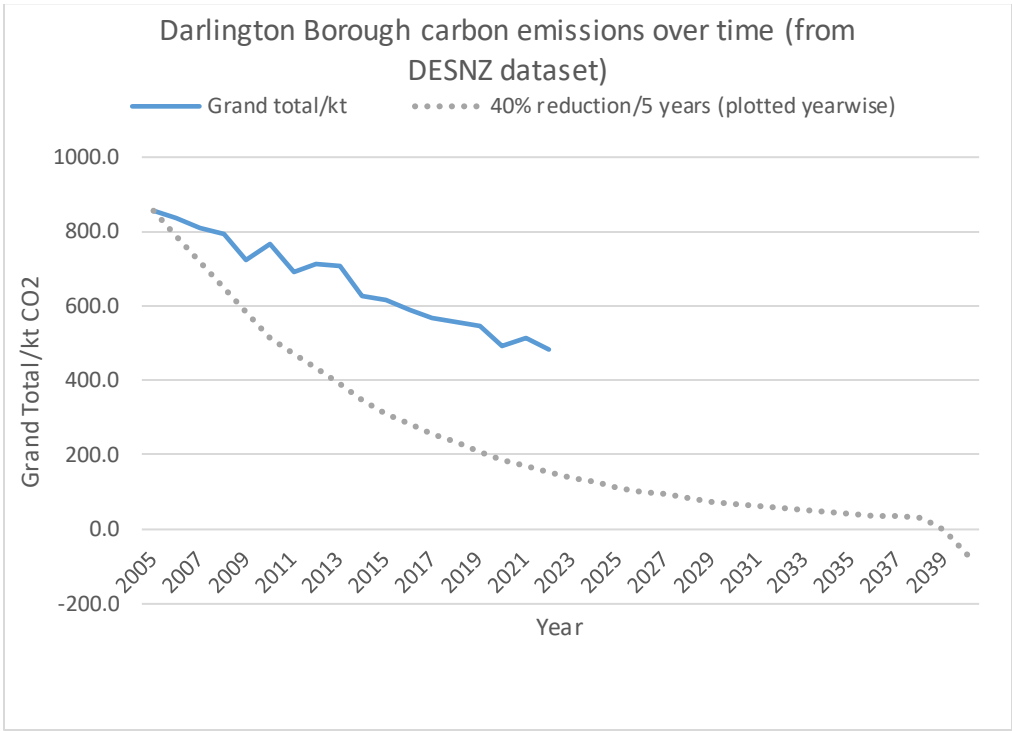


## 17. Trajectory



18. 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.
19. Clearly, the past year has seen a rise in emissions. We still need to investigate this further, but there are a few additional sets of emissions that we are reporting in this period.
20. Hoptown opened in 2024 after a period of refurbishment with a greatly increased number of buildings open to the public. The resulting increase in gas and electricity use is showing in the 2024/5 period. The listed building status of most of the buildings means that solar panels are not permitted.
21. This year also, for the first time, we have data from fuel cards for fleet and equipment used by Street Scene. As a proportion of our overall emissions, the impact of this is minor, but it is an addition to our reporting.
22. We have requested data from the Met Office on numbers of days below expected temperatures during the winter period. If there were a significant number of days, this could have impacted on the amount of gas required for heating.
23. Further investigation will take place and will be reported at the six-monthly report due in January 2026.
24. On the positive side, we carried out an audit of Council land to assess its ability to store carbon. The full report is on the website, but initial figures suggest Council land is currently storing approximately 1000 tonnes each year.
25. The 2023 motion bringing forward the date for carbon neutrality to 2040, also included a requirement to monitor Borough-wide emissions. These figures are drawn from the

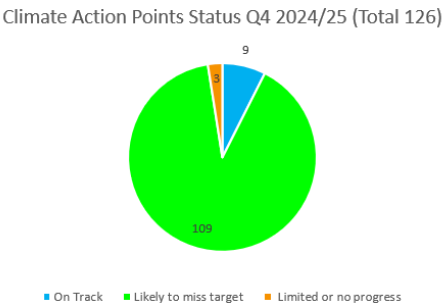
government’s published figures. These are published in summer, two years in arrears, so data for 2023 is not yet available to us. The figures below relate to 2022.



- 26. We have no target for Borough emissions, but we have mapped the Government data against a 40% reduction every five years trajectory, to align with our Council target.
- 27. The Council is directly responsible for 2-5% of Borough emissions. However, we do have the ability to influence up to 80% of them. The difference in the actual vs trajectory above, demonstrates that we must reflect on the wider implications of decisions we make.

Climate change action plan

- 28. At the end of March 2025, 109 actions were on track with nine completed (see Appendix 1). Three actions were likely to miss their target, mostly due to capacity issues.



- 29. Highlights include:
  - (a) In 2023, the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer was invited to take part in a project to develop guidance for local authorities to report to Defra on adaptation progress. This work culminated in a trial in 2024, for local authorities to report to the Secretary of State under the Climate Change Act’s Adaptation Reporting Power. Our report was submitted in December 2024 and was well received with feedback stating



that it was a “fair description of the climate issues facing the council and the steps to overcome these challenges using a wide range of data and statistics”.

- (b) Work on installing solar panels on the Dolphin Centre has begun and this and other actions within the Dolphin Centre are expected to be completed ahead of schedule.
  - (c) Against initial expectations, encouraging the taxi trade to switch to electric is proceeding well. At the beginning of the programme, we had 13 hybrid vehicles and no electric vehicles in the licensed fleet. We now have 76 hybrids and five fully electric, which equates to 31.7% of our fleet.
  - (d) The initial tree planting target was 20,000 trees by 2025. The team has worked with community groups, businesses and schools and the current total is approximately 47,700. The target has now been increased to 100,000 trees by 2030.
  - (e) In 2024, the Head of Environmental Services and the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer worked together to commission the first UK local authority audit of council land and its ability to absorb carbon. Following that audit, the Environment team is now running a trial on alternative seeding to increase the potential of council land to absorb carbon emissions.
  - (f) We have extended the HVO trial on our refuse trucks and have now added solar panels on five of the refuse trucks. These panels reduce the amount of fuel used on ancillary tasks such as the lifts, radios and lights.
30. Following the recent motion declaring a nature restoration emergency, we will revise the climate change strategy and action plan.

### **Financial Implications**

31. A reserve fund allowing agreed savings from projects to be set aside for investment in future climate projects has been set up.

### **Legal Implications**

32. 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**

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

### **Estates and Property Advice**

34. 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**

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

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

36. Climate change is a corporate priority. Public scrutiny in this area is growing and we should consider and set out the climate impacts of decisions. This report shows how we are progressing on our journey.

### **Equalities considerations**

37. 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**

38. 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.

**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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## **COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES AND RENT 2024-25**

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

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To provide Members with an update on the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2024-25 and to seek approval for the write-off of debts over £1,000 that are irrecoverable.

#### **Summary**

2. The Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2024-25 has continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate.
3. However, despite the challenges, a total of £143.45 million has been collected in 2024-25, as follows:
  - (a) £79.19 million of Council Tax
  - (b) £33.78 million of Business Rates
  - (c) £30.48 million of Council rents.
4. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £1,226,320 of debts in respect of individual cases exceeding £1,000 for the financial year 2024-25, where it has become apparent that no further steps can be taken to recover the sums due, as follows:
  - (a) £386,385 of Council Tax
  - (b) £331,368 of Business Rates
  - (c) £174,791 of former Council tenant arrears
  - (d) £86,253 of Housing Benefit overpayments
  - (e) £247,523 of sundry debts.
5. This report was considered by the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 26 June 2025, who agreed its onward submission for consideration by Cabinet.

## **Recommendation**

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (a) Consider the contents of the report, and
  - (b) Approve the write-off of £1,226,320 for debts over £1,000, subject to further steps for recovery being taken, wherever possible, if and when contact with the debtor is made.

## **Reasons**

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
  - (a) The collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents underpins the Council's MTFP.
  - (b) The write-off of irrecoverable debts enables the Council's accounts to be maintained in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules.

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

## **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's ECONOMY priority to build a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all
Addressing inequalities	The Council Tax and Business Rates Recovery Strategy sets out how the Council treats all our customers fairly and consistently in the recovery of debts and ensures individual's rights are protected
Tackling Climate Change	The efficient and effective collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and rents supports the funding of initiatives within the Council's Climate Change Strategy
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report does not contain proposals but refers to ongoing initiatives to increase income
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues which this report needs to address
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	The report affects all wards
Groups Affected	The report affects all residents
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This report does not represent a key decision
Urgent Decision	This report does not represent an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	There are no issues which this report needs to address

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

#### Council Tax

8. During 2024-25, a total of £80.29 million of Council Tax was due, of which £77.34 million was collected (or 96.3%). In addition, £1.85 million of Council Tax arrears relating to previous years was collected in 2024-25. This compares to £72.52 million collected in 2023-24 (or 96.4%) and £1.88 million of Council Tax arrears.
9. The Collection of Council Tax during 2024-25 has continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. However, despite the challenges, Council Tax arrears have only increased slightly from £6.26 million in March 2024 to £6.55 million in March 2025.
10. The Council is still expecting to collect the overall target of 99% of Council Tax due for 2024-25. A summary of Council Tax collection from 2012 is given at table 1 below and shows that collection rates remain high, and arrears are well managed.

**Table 1: Council Tax collection summary**

Year	Council Tax (£,000)				Percentage Collected to date
	Due	Collected	Written-off	Outstanding	
2012-13	41,262	40,890	361	11	99.1%
2013-14	44,662	44,177	481	4	98.9%
2014-15	46,291	45,697	584	10	98.7%
2015-16	47,874	47,201	657	16	98.6%
2016-17	50,238	49,528	691	20	98.6%
2017-18	53,288	52,507	741	40	98.5%
2018-19	57,166	56,372	720	74	98.6%
2019-20	60,092	59,393	553	146	98.8%
2020-21	61,561	60,785	479	297	98.7%
2021-22	67,565	66,275	638	652	98.1%
2022-23	70,788	69,470	406	912	98.1%
2023-24	75,059	73,270	261	1,528	97.6%
2024-25	80,277	77,337	113	2,827	96.3%

11. However, some of the older outstanding debts have been identified as irrecoverable and approval for write-off is being sought. A total of £386,385 Council Tax debts over £1,000 have been identified for write-off in 2024-25. This represents 0.48% of the Council Tax due to be collected in 2024-25. Details of the proposed Council Tax debts over £1,000 to be written off are given at table 2 below.

**Table 2: Proposed Council Tax debts over £1,000 to be written off 2024-25**

Reason for write-off	Value
Bankruptcy/Debt Relief Order	£222,042
No longer financially viable	£93,406
No forwarding address	£34,717
Council Tax Support	£27,060
Deceased	£5,408
Debt over 6 years old	£2,723
Official error	£1,029
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£386,385</b>

12. Details of the reasons for the write-off of debts are as follows:

- (a) **Bankruptcy/Debt Relief Order** – these are debts where the debtor has been made bankrupt, insolvent or is subject to a Debt Relief Order, and there are no assets left to recover the debt.
- (b) **No longer financially viable** – these are debts where all reasonable steps to recover the amounts have been taken, but it is no longer financially viable to proceed further. For example, this could be as a result of information from an Enforcement Agent, advice from Legal Services or the debtor being in prison.

- (c) **No forwarding address** – these are debts where all reasonable steps have been taken to trace the debtor, but their current whereabouts are not known. If contact is made in the future, the debt will become recoverable again.
  - (d) **Council Tax Support** – these are debts which are actively being collected through the maximum deductions allowable from the debtor’s Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits, but where the debtor has multiple debts outstanding.
  - (e) **Deceased** – these are debts where the debtor is deceased and there are no assets left in the estate.
  - (f) **Debt over six years old** – these are debts where all reasonable steps to recover the amounts have been taken, but it is no longer financially viable to proceed further, and the debt is over six years old.
  - (g) **Official error** – these are debts caused because of an error made by the Council or another official organisation, such as the DWP, and the debt is irrecoverable.
13. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £539,714 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £1,000. A summary of the write-offs for 2024-25, including credits written back, is given at table 3 below.

**Table 3: Council Tax write-off summary 2024-25**

Classification	Value
Debts over £1,000 written-off	£386,385
Debts under £1,000 written-off	£539,714
Credits written back	-£90,381
Debts written-off reversal*	-£37,535
<b>Total net write-off</b>	<b>£798,183</b>

14. \*Debts written-off reversal: These are debts previously written-off that have been reversed back to recover following successful contact with the debtor.

### Business Rates

15. During 2024-25, a total of £34.06 million of Business Rates was due, of which £33.78 million was collected (or 99.2%). This compares to £31.16 million collected in 2023-24 (or 99.9%).
16. As with Council Tax, the collection of Business Rates during 2024-25 continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. However, despite the challenges, Business Rates arrears (excluding costs) remain at low levels at £0.75 million in March 2025, compared to £0.80 million in March 2024.
17. The Council has already exceeded the collection target of 99% of Business Rates due for 2024-25. A summary of Business Rates collection from 2012 is given at table 4 below and

shows that collection rates remain high, and arrears are well managed.

**Table 4: Business rates collection summary**

Year	Council Tax (£,000)				Percentage Collected to date
	Due	Collected	Written-off	Outstanding	
2012-13	32,344	31,763	573	8	98.2%
2013-14	33,257	32,664	575	18	98.2%
2014-15	33,546	33,110	436	0	98.7%
2015-16	34,063	33,733	330	0	99.0%
2016-17	35,738	35,305	431	2	98.8%
2017-18	33,545	33,166	376	3	98.9%
2018-19	33,683	33,313	349	21	98.9%
2019-20	32,926	32,758	156	12	99.5%
2020-21	18,395	18,372	17	6	99.9%
2021-22	26,391	26,320	61	10	99.7%
2022-23	31,537	31,484	-50	103	99.8%
2023-24	31,202	30,698	195	309	98.4%
2024-25	34,060	33,782	22	256	99.2%

18. However, some of the older outstanding debts have been identified as irrecoverable and approval for write-off is being sought. A total of £331,368 Business Rates debts over £1,000 have been identified for write-off in 2024-25. This represents 0.97% of the Business Rates due to be collected in 2024-25. Details of the proposed Business Rates debts over £1,000 to be written off are given at table 5 below.

**Table 5: Proposed Business Rates debts over £1,000 to be written off 2024-25**

Reason for write-off	Value
No longer financially viable	£199,452
Bankruptcy	£126,964
No forwarding address	£3,944
Debt over 6 years old	£1,008
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£331,368</b>

19. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £19,364 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £1,000. A summary of the write-offs for 2024-25, including credits written back, is given at table 6 below.



**Table 6: Business Rates write-off summary 2024-25**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Value</b>
Debts over £1,000 written-off	£331,368
Debts under £1,000 written-off	£19,364
Credits written back	-£9,449
Debts written-off reversal	-£22,937
<b>Total net write-off</b>	<b>£318,345</b>

**Council Rents**

20. During 2024-25, a total of £30.9 million of Council rent was due and £30.3 million was collected (or 98.0%). In addition, £178,121 of former tenant arrears were also collected. The amount of rent arrears has decreased from £959,140 in April 2024 to £880,829 in April 2025.
21. Housing Services are committed to help tenants to maintain a tenancy through prevention, support and debt recovery and make all reasonable attempts to recover debts and provide practical advice and assistance to tenants facing difficulties with their rent payments.
22. Recovery action for current tenant rent charges includes letters, home visits, emails, text message and phone calls. Court action is taken to regain possession of the property as a last resort action. However, a supportive stance in relation to rent collection has been taken throughout 2024-25 to assist tenants to maintain their tenancy.
23. However, former tenant debts, including rechargeable repairs, may be written-off where recovery is uneconomical to the Council, or the tenant's whereabouts remain unknown for over a year, despite all reasonable tracing efforts being made. Current tenant arrears are only written-off where the tenant is subject to the Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space), Debt Relief Orders, Bankruptcy or Individual Voluntary Arrangements.
24. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £174,791 of former tenant rent arrears over £1,000, where all reasonable recovery efforts have been exhausted. This represents 0.56% of Council rents due to be collected in 2024-25. Details of the proposed former tenant rent arrears over £1,000 to be written off are given at table 7 below.

**Table 7: Proposed former tenant rent arrears over £1,000 to be written off 2024-25**

<b>Reason for write-off</b>	<b>Value</b>
No longer financially viable	£112,301
No forwarding address	£37,912
Deceased	£20,787
Debtor in prison	£2,402
Debtor in residential care	£1,389
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£174,791</b>

25. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £67,971 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £1,000. A summary of the write-offs for 2024-25, including credits written back, is given at table 8 below.

**Table 8: Former tenant arrears write-off summary 2024-25**

Classification	Value
Debts over £1,000 written-off	£174,791
Debts under £1,000 written-off	£67,971
Credits written back	-£1,223
<b>Net write-off</b>	<b>£241,539</b>

### Housing Benefit Overpayments

26. During 2024-25, a total of £428,985 Housing Benefit overpayments were identified and £453,719 was collected (or 105.8%). The amount of outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments has therefore reduced from £1.34 million in March 2024 to £1.19 million in March 2025.
27. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £86,253 of Housing Benefit overpayments over £1,000, where all reasonable recovery efforts have been exhausted. This represents 4.88% of all Housing Benefit overpayments due to be collected in 2024-25. Details of the proposed Housing Benefit overpayments over £1,000 to be written off are given at table 9 below.

**Table 9: Proposed Housing Benefit overpayments over £1,000 to be written off 2024-25**

Reason for write-off	Value
Official error	£35,339
Deceased	£22,743
Bankruptcy/Debt Relief Order	£22,522
No longer financially viable	£4,462
Hardship	£1,188
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£86,253</b>

28. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £13,287 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £1,000. A summary of the write-offs for 2024-25 is given at table 10 below.

**Table 10: Housing Benefit overpayments write-off summary 2024-25**

Classification	Value
Debts over £1,000 written off	£86,253
Debts under £1,000 written-off	£13,287
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£99,540</b>

## Sundry Debt invoices

29. During 2024-25, a total of £36.386 million of new sundry debts were raised and £36.751 million was collected (or 101.0%). The amount of outstanding sundry debts has increased slightly from £11.322 million in March 2024 to £11.552 million in March 2025, as some of the debt collected related to sundry debts raised in previous years.
30. Approval is being sought to write-off a total of £247,523 of sundry debts over £1,000, where all reasonable recovery efforts have been exhausted. This represents 0.68% of all sundry debts due to be collected in 2024-25. Details of the proposed sundry debts over £1,000 to be written-off are given at table 11 below.
31. **Table 11: Proposed sundry debts over £1,000 to be written-off 2024-25**

Reason for write-off	Value
Deceased	£127,701
No longer financially viable	£119,822
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£247,523</b>

32. Members should also be aware that, for the same period, £281,342 has been authorised for write-off in respect of sums of less than £1,000. A summary of the write-offs for 2024-25 is given at table 12 below.

**Table 12: Sundry debts write-off summary 2024-25**

Classification	Value
Debts over £1,000 written-off	£247,523
Debts under £1,000 written-off	£281,342
<b>Total write-off</b>	<b>£528,865</b>

## Financial Implications

33. From April 2013, following the introduction of the Non-Domestic Rates Retention scheme, the Council has become liable for its proportion (49%) of the bad and doubtful debts with the remainder being shared between Central Government (50%) and the Durham and Darlington Fire Authority (1%). This has been allowed for in the Council's accounts. Provision for bad and doubtful Council Tax debt has already been made in the Council's accounts so that the write-offs as recommended have no additional financial impact on the Council.
34. Financial regulations require authorities to make an annual assessment of the extent to which any money owed to the Council is likely to prove irrecoverable and make adequate provision in their accounts. The financial implications of writing-off the proposed former tenant arrears debt has therefore, already been taken into account in the Housing Revenue Account.

35. In respect of Housing Benefit overpayments, the DWP has recognised that in a system as complex as the Housing Benefit scheme, errors will occur. The DWP provide incentives for local authorities to minimise the number of these errors. As a result, local authorities receive subsidy depending on the type of overpayment.
36. Official error overpayments are subsidised at 100%, therefore these overpayments will be fully reimbursed by the DWP. All other eligible overpayments are funded at 40% subsidy, most of which are then successfully recovered. There will be no financial impact on the Council's current revenue budget as provisions have been made in the previous year.
37. For sundry debts, a provision is made in the accounts for bad debts on a monthly basis and reflected in budgets. Debts over one year old are provided for on a 100% basis, so the write-offs outlined above will have no adverse effect on the MTFP. Debts of less than one year old may also be provided for and the decision of how much to provide is taken in consultation with the manager responsible for the service.

**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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## **QUARTER 4 - COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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

**Responsible Director -**  
**Rose Rouse, Chief Executive and all Executive Directors**

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## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The is the performance report of the new Council Plan 2024-27. It summarises progress against the key commitments and deliverables in the plan.

### **Summary**

2. The Council Plan was approved by Council on 18 July 2024. The plan outlines Darlington Borough Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for action over the next three years. It gives strategic direction to the Council and Council services, defining priorities, identifying key actions and shaping delivery.
3. The plan recognises the fundamental link between health, wellbeing and the economy. There are six priorities: economy, homes, living well, children and young people, communities and local environment. Three core principles shape the delivery of the plan: addressing inequalities, tackling climate change and efficient and effective use of resources.
4. This report provides a summary of the key actions taken by the council to deliver the priorities in the Council Plan. The appendix contains narrative from lead service areas on key actions, demonstrating delivery of the priorities and core principles.
5. The full plan can be found on the council website.

### **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that Cabinet note the progress made in the delivery of the Council Plan.

## Reasons

7. To monitor progress against key actions and priorities in the Council Plan.

## Chief Officers Executive

## Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Council Plan 2024 - 2027

Lynne Davies: Extension 5070

Council Plan	This report is about the delivery of the council plan
Addressing inequalities	Update on key actions are highlighted in the plan
Tackling Climate Change	Update on key actions are highlighted in the plan
Efficient and effective use of resources	Update on key actions are highlighted in the plan
Health and Wellbeing	Update on key actions are highlighted in the plan
S17 Crime and Disorder	Update on key actions are highlighted in the plan
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This does not require a decision affecting the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Update and key actions are highlighted in the plan

## MAIN REPORT

## INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

8. The Council Plan was agreed at Council on 18 July 2024. The plan is shaped by three core principles: addressing inequalities; tackling climate change; and efficient and effective resources. They are a long-term commitment to enhancing the wellbeing of all residents and ensuring the council can deliver the greatest impact within available resources.
9. There are six priorities for delivery:
  - (a) Economy
  - (b) Homes
  - (c) Living well
  - (d) Children and young people
  - (e) Communities
  - (f) Local environment

10. There has been considerable progress this year despite a tight financial settlement and increasing demands for services. Highlights of actions led by the Council include:
  - (a) **The Safety Valve Plan** for the education budget is on track to have eliminated the deficit within the terms of the agreement with DfE by the end of 2026/27. Delivering on this plan will enable the council and partners to proceed with improvements in a financially sustainable way.
  - (b) Two successful **Jobs Fairs** delivered in the Dolphin Centre supporting people to find work and overcome barriers to employment with around 1000 jobs seekers and 100 employers and support organisations at each event.
  - (c) The process to identify a preferred private sector development partner to bring forward **development on several town centre sites** is near completion. A paper is going to Cabinet in July 2025 to seek endorsement for the appointment of the preferred partner.
  - (d) Completion of Phase One of the **Neasham Road council housing development programme**, delivering 21 new homes as part of the priority to increase the number of affordable homes in the Borough.
  - (e) A report was published in February 2025 following an **inspection of how services in the area support children and young people with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in November 2024**. It said children and young people with SEND have a voice in Darlington; they are valued, visible and included in their communities.
  - (f) The Council's **Adults Social Care Services have been rated 'Good'** in a comprehensive assessment by the Care Quality Commission, confirming the council's robust performance in supporting residents' independence, wellbeing and care needs.
  - (g) **Darlington's Health and Wellbeing Strategy agreed and published** by the Health and Wellbeing Board, setting out strategic objectives that key stakeholders will collaborate on to improve health outcomes for the Borough's residents.
  - (h) Darlington's place in the **Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods programme confirmed** in the Government's Autumn Budget 2024 with a funding allocation of £20m over the next 10 years.
  - (i) **Hopetown Darlington opened** to the public on 16 July 2024 with an official opening on 27 September, the 199th birthday of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The attraction has since won three major awards.
11. This report summarises key actions over the last six months and areas of progress in delivering the priorities and core principles in the plan. The appendix to this report contains further narrative and supporting data.

## CORE PRINCIPLES

### Efficient and Effective Use of Resources

12. Council approved the 2025/26 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) at their February 2025 meeting. The revenue budget management outturn report for 2024/25 shows an improved position of £1.149m on the 2025/26 MTFP opening balance with an overall positive position against the 2024/25 MTFP of £0.264m. Further detail can be found in the July Cabinet report. All services continue to scrutinise all their budgets to assist with the current and future years budgets and to ensure value for money.
13. The Council remains focused on delivering high quality governance and decision-making and has many measures in achieving this for example:
  - (a) Regular meetings of the member working group to review council decision-making and the role of scrutiny committees.
  - (b) Delivering of training on a range of topics including: code of conduct, procurement, governance and political awareness.
14. Key strategies and plans are under review:
  - (a) Workforce strategy - a draft strategy and supporting frameworks have been produced and staff consultation stage just concluded; next steps are to review feedback.
  - (b) Asset management plan – the plan, now referred to as the strategic asset plan will be referred to Cabinet in September 2025.
  - (c) Procurement strategy – the strategy was reviewed and refreshed for the period 2025-27 and approved by Cabinet in April 2025. It ensures the Council procures goods, services and works in line with the Procurement Act 2023 (which came into force on 24 February 2025), the Council Plan and our key objectives. The Council Plan prioritises growing the local economy and procurement activity can help in delivering this goal.
  - (d) Digital Darlington strategy – following public consultation the strategy was refreshed for the period 2025-30 and approved by Cabinet in March 2025. It sets the direction to increase the Council's productivity and efficiency through the use of technology and is underpinned by a delivery plan.
15. A bespoke project management system within Microsoft Teams has been developed in partnership with Xentrall to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of capital project delivery, the system is currently being tested.
16. Work continues to maximise income through joint venture companies, increase business rates by growing the local economy and maximise grant opportunities:
  - (a) The Council has a framework partnership with ESH Homes Ltd to deliver a number of housing sites in the Borough with work underway to deliver 612 units across



Blackwell, Neasham Road and Burtree sites. Initial feasibility is also underway to bring forward development on the Coniscliffe Road site for a further 80 units.

- (b) The drive on economic growth is seeing new businesses open and with it increases in business rates. Examples from 2024/25 include the developments at Faverdale with two new retail units opening, Home Bargains and Starbucks. Business rates for Greenbox Darlington and their 400,000 square ft Grade A logistics and industrial space will also come online this year.
  - (c) Grant opportunities continue to be maximised, recent examples include the Warm Homes Social Housing fund which we were successful in bidding for, £3.55m has been allocated which will improve the energy efficiency of our Council homes and subsequently reduce energy bills for our tenants. The Council was also successful in its bid for the Swimming Pool Support Fund, £0.526m has been received to install Photovoltaic panels and a combined heat and power unit to reduce the energy consumption within the centre and subsequently our carbon footprint.
17. Partnerships continue via the voluntary and community sector engagement group and public sector executive group to build strong relationships with partners, residents and communities.

### **Addressing Inequalities**

18. Many actions delivered for the council plan address inequalities, and these are highlighted throughout the priorities sections in this report, for example the approach to SEND in children and young people. There is also support to services through an internal policy and strategy network to share information and good practice; an annual report analysing key data to inform decision making; and training, support and guidance to staff and members to help them meet their duties under the equality act.
19. The council continues to be an active member of the North East Child Poverty Commission to support their work and lobbying on the key issues for the national child poverty strategy. Analysis of data on child poverty in Darlington and the actions the council is currently undertaking to address poverty in the Borough is underway. The analysis of this work is intended to inform the approach the council takes to addressing this challenge, how collaborating with voluntary, public and business partners could be focused to address inequality, and how discretionary funding, such as the Plan for Neighbourhoods, may be deployed.
20. Work continues to ensure all new strategies and plans consider inequalities. Two important examples this year have been the publication on the following:
- (a) The health and wellbeing strategy with a health inequalities focus;
  - (b) The digital Darlington strategy and digital inclusion.
21. Darlington's inclusive growth strategy is in the early stages of development, with work focused on the analysis of data and engagement with stakeholders to understand inequalities and related challenges.

22. The council is working in partnership with key stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector to address the causes of inequality and reducing the burden of the cost of living. The Household Support Fund round seven includes support for care leavers, vulnerable households including lone parents and low income pensioners; vouchers during the school holidays for children in receipt of free school meals; help for elderly residents to energy proof their homes with Age UK; support Darlington based foodbanks; and helping households experiencing hardship identify and apply for benefits they are entitled to via Citizens Advice.

### **Tackling Climate Change**

23. The most recent government data set on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita of Darlington's population shows a decline in line with recent trends. This data is issued in late June each year and are 2 years in arrears.
24. For the Council's own net zero by 2040 target, the council is following the trajectory of a 40% reduction in council carbon emissions every five years. Given this is a long-term ambition there may be fluctuations in data between years as the council transitions. 2025 data on council emissions have shown an increase since the last year's data point. The Council is looking into reasons for these data results, but some of them can be attributed to the Dolphin Centre using more electricity from the grid, whilst the combined heat and power system was being replaced; and the development of Hopetown Darlington, which brought more buildings back into public use.
25. Progress continues to deliver the climate change commitments through the delivery of the climate change action plan. This is a cross-council plan and we have:
  - (a) Become the first UK local authority to audit council land to assess its ability to store carbon. Following that audit, the Environment Team is running a trial on alternative seeding to increase the potential of our land to absorb carbon.
  - (b) Continued with actions to reduce the Council's own energy use including installing solar panels on the Dolphin Centre, this work will be complete ahead of schedule.
  - (c) Installed solar panels on five refuse collection vehicles. This has saved almost 2,000 litres of fuel to date.
  - (d) Continued to engage with business to support their transition to net zero – shared sources of help, funding and success stories direct to businesses through our business newsletter and council website. The climate change pages on the website contain sources of advice and information for business, residents and schools.
  - (e) Continued to be an active member of Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership, a collaboration of businesses aimed at spreading good practice around the net zero challenge. Within the last six months membership has doubled to over 40.
  - (f) Submitted a report to Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on a trial expanding the Secretary of State's powers to mandate reporting on adaptation

activities to local authorities. This involved the council risk assessing its activities against risks identified by the Climate Change Commission.

## PRIORITIES

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

### **CASE STUDY: Jobs Fair and Learning and Skills Service Supporting People into Work**

The Council's Learning & Skills service is an externally funded further education and training provider, offering courses to help Darlington residents gain in confidence, upskill and find employment. The team takes a regular stand at the Jobs Fairs held in the Dolphin Centre, and organised by the Business Growth Team.

The team supported a young person 19 years of age who they met at the Jobs Fair, he was new to the area living with his grandma. He wanted to find work so he could live independently again, but had little confidence and no formal qualifications.

The team supported the young man to find an appropriate training course with a guaranteed job interview through their Bespoke Employer Led Programs. The team helped the young man with his confidence to attend the course and supported him throughout. He succeeded at his interview, and now has a comi chef job within the hotel which he really enjoys, he will be travelling to Ireland as part of this role for further training to develop his career.

26. Key datasets are showing the outlook in Darlington remains positive. The number of people self-employed now stands at 58,000, a decline from the previous year, but part of a steady increase since 2021. Business formation rates remain above the North East average and on an upward trajectory.
27. Changes in employment have followed regional trends over the last two year of reporting and is on an upward trend, now at 4.1% (compared with 2.9% North East average). Resident and employee weekly gross pay for full time workers continues on an upward trend and in line with the North East average. The unemployment rate remains fairly static over recent years and at 4% (March 2025) is just below the regional average at 4.1%.
28. Economic confidence remains high with planning permission secured for the Darlington Economic Campus government hub on Brunswick Street in the town centre in August 2024; in February 2025 Amazon unveiled plans to develop its first UK drone delivery centre in Darlington; and in March 2025 Greenbox Darlington completed 400,000ft<sup>2</sup> Grade A logistics and industrial space at a 24-acre site in Tornado Way.
29. The Market Hall in the town centre continues to thrive. New businesses have taken up residency; the hall has become an events destination with a variety of events attracting

businesses and footfall; and a vibrant and diverse programme of regular markets has been delivered with a focus on attracting independent traders from across the region.

30. The new inclusive growth strategy will be developed with long-term approach to enable a fair distribution of growth across the Borough and ensure there are accessible economic opportunities for all residents. This work begun with a roundtable event with stakeholders to understand the challenges, barriers and opportunities for growth from local employers.
31. In February 2025 the Council delivered the second of two annual Darlington Jobs Fairs in at the Dolphin Centre, promoting good jobs and career opportunities available in the Borough. 1000 jobs seeker attended to meet around 100 employers and support organisations who were there to help people find work, and support in overcoming barriers to employment.
32. Development work continues on programmes to deliver more education and skills opportunities for residents, working in partnership with key stakeholders:
  - (a) The Council's learning and skills service and Darlington College jointly developing the adult skills centre in the old Northern Echo building due to complete November 2025. The commercial floors of the building will complete in early 2026.
  - (b) Council staff collaborating with TVCA, DWP and DfE to develop the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer which will encourage 18-21 yearly olds into employment, supporting those with disability, long-term health issues or multiple and complex barriers into work. It will start later in 2025 administered by TVCA.
33. Work continues to deliver the Towns Fund projects with the programme now in the latter stages of delivery. The redevelopment of Coniscliffe Road is complete; improvements to Skinnergate, the Yards and Victoria Road continue; and the redevelopment of 156 Northgate into office accommodation is now underway.
34. The Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods programme confirmed £20m of funding and support over 10 years for Darlington's urban core. Cabinet agreed to recommendations by officers to support the Towns Board to take on the role of the Neighbourhood Board. The programme will bring together representatives from the community, business and strategic partners to prioritise funding into areas of local need.
35. The Council continues to prioritise the safety and cleanliness of the Borough for the benefit of residents and to sustain business confidence and investment. Prevention, education and enforcement measures has been used to deliver the service which independent auditing has given an excellent rating with an average score of 85% for the overall cleanliness of the area.

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

### **CASE STUDY: Supporting residents to live independently in their own homes for longer:**

The disabled facilities grant supports residents to make changes to their homes to enable them to live independently for longer. Adult social care occupational therapists assess need and make referrals for small and larger adaptations, aids and equipment.

The team has supported a 92 year old lady who lives on her own in a housing association bungalow. She referred herself to adult social care as she was struggling using the bath. Occupational therapy assessed her physical health and agreed an outcome was needed that secured her independence with personal care and showering.

A wet room has since been installed and the resident has been able to continue supporting herself without the help of another.

36. A New Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-30 was approved by Cabinet in March 2025 following full public consultation in November 2024 and consideration by the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2025. Key priorities:
- (a) Working in partnership to prevent homelessness.
  - (b) Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.
  - (c) Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups including those with multiple and complex needs. Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision.
  - (d) Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources.
37. In reviewing the Council's approach to empty homes the number of problematic long-term empty properties has been found to be very low. A review of empty homes and the legislation used by the Council will be carried out and a will be report produced on developing the recommended approach and the resources required.
38. As reported in the previous performance report the new build housing sector has seen a slow down in delivery largely due to the impact of the nutrient neutrality designation, it is anticipated that this will continue throughout this year. Recently applications have been progressing and gaining consent.
39. Demand for Council housing is high with over 2000 households currently registered on the waiting list. A council house build programme is currently underway, part funded by Homes England:

- (a) By March 2025 tenants had moved into the first 40 homes at Neasham Road. The site will deliver 150 new homes by mid 2026.
  - (b) Phase 2 of Sherborne Close is due in September 2025 and will deliver 14 new homes.
  - (c) Building of new shops and 16 new homes is due to commence in Skinnergate in 2025 following demolition of the existing commercial buildings.
40. A draft new homes strategy has been prepared and is currently under review by Cabinet members, it is intended that the strategy goes to Cabinet in July 2025 seeking approval for public consultation.
41. Work continues to deliver greater energy efficiency in existing properties. The Council has been successful in all three waves of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF):
- (a) Wave 1 is complete and supported 23 Council homes.
  - (b) Wave 2 commenced in September 2024, is supporting 130 council homes and is due to complete in June 2025.
  - (c) In March 2025 the Council was successful in bidding for £3.5m which will help deliver upgrades to around 1600 Council homes over a three-year period. This funding and resources from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Expenditure will significantly increase the percentage of Council homes rated EPC C or above, which is currently 54.8%.
42. Ensuring the effective use of the Disabled Facilities Grant to enable people to remain in independent in their homes for longer. Occupational therapists support residents by assessing the family and home and identifying need; the council will then provide technology and building adjustments to enable people to live in their own home for longer.
43. At 20.77% Darlington's private rented stock is higher than the national average and highest in the Tees Valley. In support of improving private rented sector homes the Council has identified the following schemes for further investigation:
- (a) A voluntary landlords charter;
  - (b) The introduction of licensing for homes of multiple occupation. The council are now consulting on an Article 4 Direction to control the change of use from a dwelling to a small house of multiple occupation;
  - (c) The introduction of selective licencing in areas with a high number of private sector rented homes.
44. The Renter's Rights Bill, expected to be introduced in 2025, will have a significant impact on these proposed schemes. A report on the development of the Council's approach to enforcement responsibilities will be updated following the introduction of the bill.

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

### **CASE STUDY: DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL ADULT SOCIAL CARE SERVICES RATED 'GOOD' BY THE CARE QUALITY COMMISSION**

The adult social care service has been rated 'Good' with an overall score of 73% by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The CQC inspected the Council in January 2025 in relation to compliance with the Care Act Part One.

The report highlights numerous strengths including:

- A consistent strength-based assessment programme
- Effective hospital discharge arrangements and reablement services
- High satisfaction amongst unpaid carers
- A responsive and person-centred approach from social workers
- Strong multi-agency partnerships and a commitment to continuous improvement

The 'Good' rating reflects the council's ongoing commitment to putting people first, promoting independence, and delivering high-quality care for everyone in Darlington.

45. Detailed analysis of key data indicators can be found in the appendix, and there have been some big changes in key data sets. Headlines to note:
- (a) The prevalence of smoking amongst people over 18 years (7.9%) has seen a big decline, and the most significant reduction has been in routine and manual smokers (from 21.2% to 9.5%);
  - (b) The percentage of women who smoke at the time of delivery (10.6%) is also in decline. Since 2020 there has been a reduction every year and a narrowing of the gap with the North East, whilst this is positive the health and wellbeing strategy has a focus on accelerating the reduction and reducing the inequalities which exist within Darlington, this was a focus of discussion at the last Health and Wellbeing Board;
  - (c) Excess weight for primary school pupils in Reception and Year 6 is declining slowly and now below the NE average, although longer term trends show minimal change overall;
  - (d) There has been an improvement in the number of adults in treatment at specialist drug and alcohol misuse service; the numbers of young people in treatment have also increased;
  - (e) Emergency hospital admissions for intentional self-harm (all age) is declining at pace and now at national levels and lower than the NE. But the most recent statistics for 2023 show an increase in suicide rates and work is underway with partners to develop a suicide prevention plan for Darlington.

46. Following the publication of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy in December 2024 its implementation is being monitored by the Health and Wellbeing Board. This will take the form of an annual review and a deep dive into 2 of the 8 thematic priorities each year. The first deep dive in June will look at pregnancy and early years.
47. The development and delivery of public health strategies continues in partnership with local stakeholders:
  - (a) The physical activities strategy is complete has been approved by Cabinet;
  - (b) The healthy weight plan, oral health promotion strategy and local suicide prevention plan are being developed with local stakeholders;
  - (c) The County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group partnership board leads strategic priorities and actions; the Domestic Safe Accommodation Strategy is currently being refreshed; and a multi-agency domestic abuse local working group established to develop actions for achieving compliance with local authority duties;
  - (d) Additional government funding has been confirmed for drug and alcohol treatment services.
48. Work continues to explore joint working with the NHS and key partners to support people to stay in their homes for longer and reduce hospital stays. The task and finish group reviewing the intermediate care offer is currently exploring best practice across the region and developing option appraisals to share with partners. Work is also ongoing to explore discharge hub models with the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), Trust and four other Tees Valley Local Authorities.
49. The adult social care service has a clear transformation plan which is reviewed on a monthly basis. Key aims of the transformation plan are to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own care and wellbeing. The service has recently been inspected and received a 'Good' rating. The plan will be reviewed to take account of any areas for development outlined in the CQC inspection report.
50. The development of the adult social care engagement and co-production strategy is now complete. Work continues to develop an action plan that supports the delivery of the strategy.
51. The Council has taken a consultative approach to developing a Market Position Statement and Commissioning Strategy with an associated Accommodation with Care and Support Needs Strategy to support adults and a Sufficiency Statement to support children. These documents are important in providing information about the care market and how it is likely to change to support existing and prospective providers. Outcome based contracts have been relet or retendered across key areas for service provision including homecare, residential care and supported living.



52. Following the reopening of the pool complex in the Dolphin Centre school holidays in October and February have proven highly successful with both breaking records on footfall and income. Membership continues to rise and numbers of events held in the centre are increasing including Mixed Martial Arts and the Stronger Community Awards. The new facilities at Eastbourne Sports Complex have been a success and the team is now exploring funding options to improve the wider grass pitches and further increase the number of service users of the complex.

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

### **CASE STUDY: Inspectors Say Children with SEND are ‘Valued, Visible and Included’**

Following a full public consultation on a new SEND strategy in December 2024 by the local area partnership for Darlington inspectors for Ofsted and Care Quality Commission published their report on how their services in the area support children and young people with SEND. The report was very positive with some areas for improvement which will be picked up in the SEND strategy implementation plan.

Highlights include:

- The partnership is ambitious for children and young people with SEND, with Leaders working closely together to improve local provision.
- Children and young people are involved effectively in co-producing the Darlington SEND strategy
- Children and young people who are in care, and have SEND, are successfully prepared for adulthood.
- Disabled children receiving support from children’s social care experience smooth transitions to adult social care.

Darlington Borough Council and the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Darlington.

53. Detailed analysis of the key quantitative indicators can be found in the appendix, key points to note:

- (a) Looked after children numbers reduced by 14% in the last year to 265 children;
- (b) A rise in suspensions and permanent exclusions in primary school, and in secondary school permanent exclusions have fallen and are below the NE average. The Inclusion Charter provides the strategic approach to addressing these high levels of suspension;
- (c) The percentage of pupils with an EHCP educated in mainstream settings has risen to 43.1% in 2024. This is in line with the national average but higher than the NE;
- (d) The percentage of pupils reaching expected standard for Key Stage 2 (end of primary school) for reading, writing and maths is slightly below regional and national averages but is increasing. Whilst the percentage of pupils achieving a 9-5 pass in English and Match at Key Stage 4 is decreasing, reflecting regional and national trends.

54. There has been an increase in Local Authority Foster Carers recruited during 2024/25, with 11 new Foster Carer Households approved at Panel, compared to 5 in 23/24 and seven in 22/23. Whilst the overall number of carers can fluctuate due to resignations and changes

of circumstances in carers, the increased number of new carers approved is a result of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and enhanced support offer to foster carers.

55. A key part of the strategy is to ensure that where children require care, placements within their family are identified for these children. There have also been increases to the number of Kinship Foster Placements supported by the Council with 53 placements in 2024/25 (31% of all Children in Care) compared to 41 placements in 2023/24 (24.2% of all Children In Care).
56. The Darlington Inclusion Charter was launched at an all-school event in June 2024. It is underpinned by evidence-based research and exemplifies four pillars of inclusive practice: presence, engagement, achievement and belonging. All schools and colleges in Darlington have signed up to the Charter as part of their commitment to inclusive practice. The Charter is now the focus of collaborative work, led by the Education Strategy Group (ESG), to develop practice further across the borough. The ESG has entered into a National Evidence Exploration partnership to support this work and the Darlington Education Psychology Service is trialling a model of training with school staff and explore what it means for school systems and practices.
57. The Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) provides free holiday club places to primary and secondary aged children on benefits-related free school meals, as well as other vulnerable children. It provides extra-curricular activities and healthy meals during the school holidays. In the Christmas school holidays over 1600 places were booked for children aged 5-16 years old, 908 free school meal children attended, 29% were SEND children. Teams continue to do what they can to encourage more eligible children to take part.
58. Work continues to support the Department for Education and Education Village Academy Trust to ensure the free school for children with SEND is developed on schedule. The latest position from the Department is now at the value for money consideration stage in the process and a further up date will be provided shortly.
59. Teams continue to work in partnership with the early years sector and health services. On school readiness, after a dip in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception most recent data shows an increase. A working group has been established to improve levels of school readiness, especially for children with free school meal status or SEND.
60. On delivering the expansion of funded childcare entitlement six DfE funded capital projects are underway to deliver an additional 65 wraparound places, 36 entitlement places for 2 year-olds, and 30 entitlement places for mixed ages. Four schools have been successful in their applications to DfE for the School-Based Nursery Capital Grant enabling them to open or expand their nursery in September 2025.
61. The Council continues to ensure more opportunities for children and young people to be involved in the design and commissioning of services. A notable example this year have been the development of the new young carers service.

62. The revised Children and Young People's Plan 2024-27, which was produced earlier in the year with extensive engagement with children, young people and key stakeholders was launched in November 2024.
63. The Safety Valve plan for the education budget is on track to have eliminated the deficit within the terms of the agreement with DfE by the end of 2026/27. The plan is in place to reduce the deficit of the Dedicated Schools Grant resulting from pressures on high needs budgets. Darlington is achieving an in year balance on the high needs block for this period alongside the previous two years.

## COMMUNITIES – safer, healthier, and more engaged communities

### **CASE STUDY: Supporting Town Centre Businesses via Shopwatch**

The Shopwatch scheme is a considerable success, it was relaunched to support business and assist the police in dealing with shoplifting. Information shows that in 2024/25, 567 incidents were logged through the scheme which enables the Police and Community safety staff to take action as and where appropriate. Shoplifting offences in the town centre have reduced by 21.8%.

The scheme has now expanded into new areas including Yarm Road and North Road retail parks providing these businesses with greater support against retail related crime. The Council continues to contribute to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's 'Safer Businesses Group' and as part of the Government's Safer Streets Summer Initiative is offering additional businesses the opportunity to trial the Shopwatch scheme over the summer months.

64. The number of reported crimes (10,391) is showing a decrease of 13.4% compared to the previous year; and anti-social behaviour has seen an increase of 16.7% in reported incidents in the last year.
65. All bodies continue to work well together as part of the Community Safety Partnership. Information shows that in January to March 2025 there was an overall reduction in crime of 9.8%. There were marked reductions alcohol related incidents (16.9%) and violent crime (5.5%). Effective work has also been undertaken on priority themes with the number of violent crimes being reduced which is linked to training across the Partnership, multi-agency working and supporting numerous projects such as Harbour, Purple flag, pub watch and Project Vigilant. The Community Safety Plan runs until March 2026 and a planning exercise and an updated Community Safety plan are currently being progressed.
66. Work continues with partners in the Borough to address anti-social behaviour and crime issues in communities:
- (a) The Shopwatch scheme continues to be a success as highlighted in the case study;
  - (b) Number 40 supports visitors to the town centre's evening economy and is supported by a committed group of volunteers;
  - (c) Of the 467 cases of fly tipping and waste reported across the year 439 are closed. This has resulted in 12 prosecutions;
  - (d) Begging figures show a reduction in reports of 11.5%. This represents a relatively small number of people who partners regularly engage with to offer support.

67. The Holiday Activity Fund and the Household Support Fund fund the main interventions supporting families and residents with the cost of living. The Council is also working with partners to reduce the cost of living and convened a meeting with eight of the Borough's foodbanks where it was agreed collaboration would be helpful, a survey is planned to help further discussions.
68. Partnership work with voluntary and community groups in the borough enabled by the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group. Alongside the three working groups on social inclusion, financial inclusion and children and young people; the group selected four of its members to join the Neighbourhood Board. These members will play a key role in delivering community engagement.
69. To ensure the safety and security of the borough's communities the Community Safety Partnership's thematic group is supported by the Unity Group with members from all sections of the community. North Road and Northgate Community Cohesion Panel has been set up to address issues negatively affecting the communities. Involvement by partners and residents is good and with initial grant funding a number of projects have been funded: improved lighting in areas of concern on North Road, installation of six defibrillator and bleed kits along the North Road corridor, and funding two youth provision initiatives in the North Road area.
70. A key area of focus on ensuring business activity is regulated to protect the health and wellbeing of Darlington's communities has been on imported fizzy drinks and confectionary. These products imported from the US contain chemicals banned in the UK or additives which may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children. The campaign to raise awareness has included liaising with local businesses and asking them to withdraw non-compliant stock. Environmental Health inspections found confectionary containing dangerous ingredients, to the value of £1600, in eight local shops.
71. A draft strategy framework has been produced to be discussed with members of the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group. It proposes a focus on: structured volunteering, employer supported volunteering, and community volunteering. The purpose is to deliver an enhanced volunteering programme to support areas of greatest need across the borough.

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

### CASE STUDY: Hopetown Darlington Wins Three Major Awards

Hopetown Darlington opened to the public on 16 July 2024 with an official opening on 27 September - the 199th birthday of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The attraction has since won three major awards:

1. The Visitor Economy Award at the County Durham Together Awards 2024
2. North East Culture Award for Best Museum or Cultural Venue 2024
3. Welcome accolade and Quality Assessed Visitor Attraction accolade awarded by VisitEngland

The S&DR200 festival was launched in February 2025 at Kynren in Bishop Auckland with the 'All Change' show, attracting an audience of over 6,500 people. A programme for the Festival has been developed to run through to October 2025, including 'Railway Pioneers – celebrating the railway rockstars of the past' a display of early locomotives launched at Hopetown Darlington on 4 April 2025 and on show until 22 June 2025.

Hopetown Darlington will also host Destination STEM in the Autumn 2025 to inspire the next generation into STEM education and careers.

72. Work continues to deliver a well-connected, clean and sustainable borough. Overall satisfaction with public transport has increased from a four-year low at 44% in 2023 to 48% in 2024. This is below the Highways and Transport Network average of all local authorities, but the gap is reducing.
73. The City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) programme is delivering investment for the Darlington mainline station upgrades, improvements on key bus corridors to improve journey time reliability and construction of active travel schemes such as Woodland Road Phase 2, A68 to Cockerton and Faverdale, and the Yarm Road to Teesside International Airport corridor. The Council continues to work closely with the TVCA to develop projects for the second round of the transport settlement programme.
74. Darlington has been awarded the Purple Flag in recognition of the safe and vibrant evening economy; and gold at the Northumbria in Bloom 2024 awards earning the prestigious opportunity to represent the region at the 2025 Britain in Bloom competition.
75. The annual events programme continues to attract visitors to the town centre, offering free and welcoming activities. The Council collaborates with high street businesses to develop a dynamic range of events that increase footfall and dwell time across the town centre. Examples include large scale music events such as Rhythm and Tunes Weekend and animation days such as Dinosaur Day.

76. Visitor numbers to Darlington Library on Crown Street have increased by 16% from the previous year, encouraged by a range of events and services for people of all ages beyond just traditional book lending. Annual audience attendances at Darlington Hippodrome are higher than the previous year, whilst attendance at the Hullabaloo is down. A review of programming has taken place which will deliver a focus on performances that have attracted higher attendances.
77. Hopetown Darlington has been an extremely complex project, one of the largest capital projects delivered by the Council with multiple partners contributing to deliver a world class visitor attraction. The successes are discussed in the case study, but there have been challenges from a slightly later than anticipated opening with some of the key facilities, such as Experiment, the showfield and the private siding being completed after opening. This has affected the programming and first-year performance against the original targets and forecasted income. There is continuous review and monitoring of the business plan with further changes planned to manage the overall costs of the site.
78. There has been a fall in the amount of waste that is recycled, composted or reused in recent years, however the figures for December 2024 show performance is now above the NE average. The Council's recycling performance sits at over 31%. Efforts are being progressed to further expand the garden waste subscription service.
79. Measures have been agreed by Cabinet to increase the amount of waste that is recycled and provide enhanced opportunities for residents to recycle as much of their waste as possible. Cabinet approved the introduction of weekly food waste collections from April 2026 in line with government's simpler recycling reforms, and to move to weekly collections of other recycling materials at the same time as the food waste launch. These measures should help increase overall recycling rates.
80. The performance of the council for the percentage of overall waste collected by the Council used for energy recovery is availability of markets to treat the waste at an affordable cost. The more waste, after recycling, that is sent to energy recovery reduces the amount landfilled. The Council is below the regional average as most other local authorities in the region have a primary contract through energy recovery facilities. In recent years more waste has been sent to energy recovery which has led to a reduction in the overall percentage that is landfilled (currently 19.2%).
81. Work continues with studies on flood risk in the Borough, including a focus on mitigating climate change. The Darlington Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership (NIDP) study identified a priority scheme covering West Beck and Cocker Beck watercourses, including the Cockerton area. The stage 1/2 report will be complete by the end of 2025. The Flood Asset Risk Study identified a scheme on West Beck which was incorporated into the NIDP; and a scheme at Killerby the business case for which, with costed options is under assessment by the Council.



# Darlington Borough Council

## Council Plan Performance Management Report

### 2024/25 Quarter 4

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## Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

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

### **Develop a cross-council approach based on an in-depth understanding of inequalities and their causes, with a focus on local communities experiencing disadvantage**

The council's policy team is undertaking analysis of data on child poverty in Darlington and the actions the Council is currently undertaking to address poverty in the Borough. This work will be considered by the Council's Chief Officers Board and Chief Officers Executive. The analysis of this work is intended to inform the approach the council takes to addressing this challenge, how collaborating with voluntary, public and business partners could be focused to address inequality, and how discretionary funding, such as the Plan for Neighbourhoods, may be deployed. The team has also taken an active role as a member of the NE Child Poverty Commission to support their work and lobbying on the key issues for the national child poverty strategy.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

**Ensure all new strategies and plans consider inequalities, starting with the development of an inclusive growth strategy and a review of the health and wellbeing strategy**

The Equality Policy and Objective 2023-27 sets out the council’s approach to meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty established in the Equality Act 2010. One part of our equality objective is to provide training, support and guidance to staff and members to help them meet their duties under the equality act. Equalities are considered within the policy and strategy development process, and the training embeds equality thinking into daily activities.

Data from a wide range of sources is regularly gathered and analysed to ensure the council has a good understanding of inequalities across the Borough and wider region. A profile report of the Borough will be published annually and used across the council to inform decision making.

Last year an internal policy network was established through which officers from across the council, who have a responsibility for policy development come together to share learning and receive briefings on the latest insights into the Borough.

The Chief Officers Executive is responsible for ensuring all new strategies and plans consider inequalities. Information regarding progress with the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy can be found elsewhere within this performance report.

Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

**Strengthen partnership working with key stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector with a long-term focus on opportunity and addressing the causes of inequality and short-term focus on reducing the burden of the cost of living. We will work with communities to understand first-hand the challenges they face**

Household Support Fund (HSF) Round 7 is being delivered through voluntary and community organisations including:

- Vouchers during holiday period for children currently in receipt of Free School Meals
- Support for Care Leavers
- 1523 Vulnerable households requiring additional support including lone parents and low income pensioners.
- Elderly residents will be offered support in energy proofing their homes via Age UK
- Darlington-based foodbanks will be supported with food provision
- Support through citizens advice for 1500 households experiencing financial hardship

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

## Core Principle: Tackling climate change

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

### Deliver the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040

The climate change action plan is reported on twice a year to Cabinet and Council. An annual report is also published on the Council's website. The Council has made progress on the actions within the plan and is following the trajectory of 40% reduction in the council's carbon emissions every five years. The Council is over half way towards the carbon neutral target.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change

**Involve all parts of the council in a cross-council approach to sustainability and climate change**

The Council's Climate Change commitment is a cross-council ambition, with actions in our action plan from directorates across the Council. Climate change is now a key principle in the Council Plan.

In December 2024, we submitted a report to the Department for Food and Rural Affairs as part of their trial on expanding the Secretary of State's adaptation reporting power. This required involvement from officers from across the Council, to help ensure we are resilient to future climate change.

This year will see the third year of the popular Eco Fair held in June 2025.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change

**Work alongside our business community collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero**

The Council continues to be an active member of the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership and is also a member of the steering group for the partnership.

The Council's Business Development Team newsletter carries information and articles relevant to Darlington businesses, including sources of help and funding to support the business community transition to net zero.

The Council's Communications Team creates content to showcase what businesses have been able to achieve and use it's own successes to inspire and encourage. The climate change pages of the website also have sources of advice and information for businesses.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change

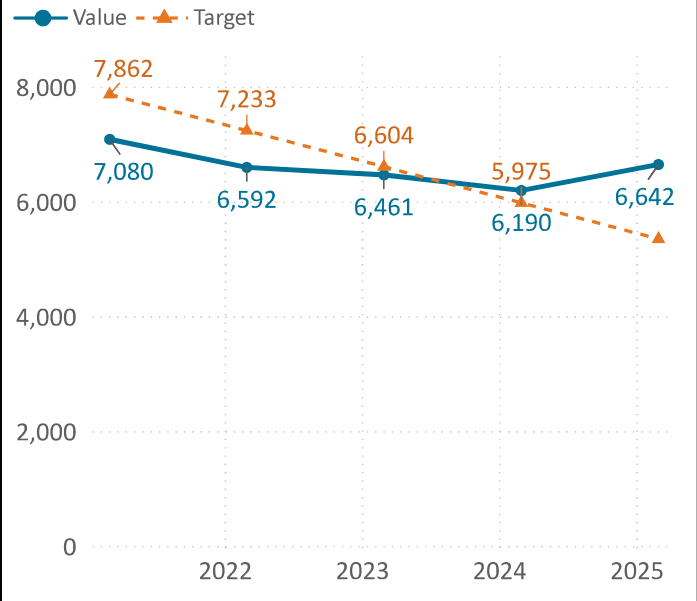
Work with partners, government, public and private sectors and residents for a resilient Darlington so we are able to respond and adapt to change.

Darlington Employers Environment Partnership (DEEP) was set up in 2023. It brings together like-minded local businesses to generate more sustainable outcomes from products, services and approaches. There are three primary benefits for businesses who join: to network and learn from each other, to make direct contact with businesses that can help them reduce their carbon footprint and to promote their businesses achievements towards Net Zero. Within the last 6 months membership has doubled to over 40.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director  
Core Principle: Tackling climate change

Darlington Borough Council emissions (tonnes of CO2 equivalent)

There has been an increase in emissions from last year. We need to explore this further, but the opening of Hopetown will have had an impact. For the first time we have included the fuel cards which adds to fleet emissions. Actions continue to be taken to reduce our energy use, for example, solar panels are currently being installed on The Dolphin Centre, which will reduce the electricity required from the grid. This work is due to be completed ahead of schedule. Solar panels have been installed on 5 refuse collection vehicles, reducing the amount of fuel used for radios, lights etc. The licensed taxi fleet now has 76 hybrids and 5 fully electric cars. This is over 30% of the fleet.



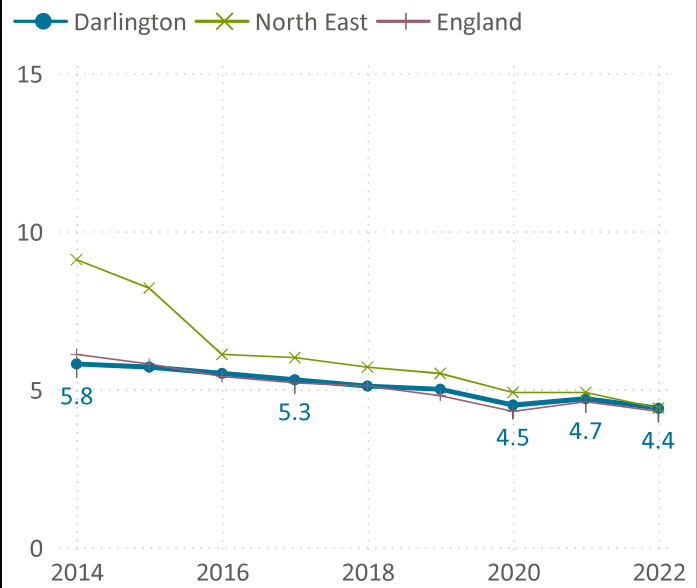
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection  
Core Principle: Tackling climate change  
Key Deliverable: Deliver the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040

CO2 emissions per capita (tonnes of CO2 equivalent)

Data for this indicator is published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, two years in arrears. Data is published in summer, so we cannot update figures at present.

We are continuing to push social media and communications messages to residents, young people and businesses to encourage action from everybody. Our Eco Fair in June 2024 saw more than 5,000 people attending the event, and we are currently planning the 2025 event.

We are supporting the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership and its efforts to reach out to businesses across Darlington.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change

Key Deliverable: Work alongside our business community collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero

## Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

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

### Deliver a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan and positive Value For Money outcome

Council approved the 2025/26 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) at their February 2025 meeting. The revenue budget management outturn report for 2024/25 shows an improved position of £1.149m on the 2025/26 MTFP opening balance with an overall positive position against the 2024/25 MTFP of £0.264m. Further detail can be found in the July Cabinet report.

All services continue to scrutinise all their budgets to assist with the current and future years budgets and to ensure value for money.

The latest audit report of the Council's accounts for 2023/24 undertaken by our external auditors Forvis Mazars did not identify any actual significant weakness in the arrangements to secure value for money in the use of Council resources.

Lead Officer: Elizabeth Davison: Executive Director - Resources & Governance

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources



**Deliver high quality governance and decision making**

Statutory officers met to review the Local Code of Corporate Governance and work progress on 7 March 2025.

The Member Working Group to review Council Decision Making and the role of Scrutiny Committees continues to meet regularly.

Training was ongoing throughout 2024 on a range of topics including: Code of Conduct, Procurement, Governance and Political Awareness.

Council, Cabinet and Committee papers have been reviewed throughout the year for compliance and delegated decisions review meetings have also been held.

The Register of gifts and hospitality has been updated throughout the year.

Staff and member comms have been circulated during the year, including topics such as the pre election period, Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and Whistleblowing.

Lead Officer: Elizabeth Davison: Executive Director - Resources & Governance

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Review and refresh the Asset Management Plan**

The production of a draft Strategic Asset Plan (to replace the existing, now dated, Asset Management Plan) has been delayed due to resource capacity and awaiting completion of the Council Plan. The draft now needs updating to accord with the Council Plan and the Council's priorities and it is intended to refer the report to Cabinet in September 2025, subject to input from the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, if considered necessary.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Review and refresh the Procurement Strategy**

The Council spends millions of pounds every year and we want to use money effectively and achieve value by purchasing and procuring what we need at the right price and quality. The Council Plan prioritises growing the local economy and procurement activity can help in delivering this goal.

The Procurement Strategy 2025 – 2027 was developed to ensure the Council procures goods, services and works in line with the Procurement Act 2023 (which came into force on 24 February 2025), the Council Plan and our key objectives. The plan will direct and inform our procurement activity and was approved by Cabinet on 8 April 2025 following consultation. The council’s procurement activity will be driven by the following key objectives and be kept under review;

1) Working together, 2) Delivering quality and value for money, 3) Social Value, 4) Climate change, 5) Governance and compliance, 6) Local economy, 7) Innovation, improvement and forward planning.

Lead Officer: Amy Wennington: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Build on the Capital Project Management process by introducing an enhanced ICT system to improve efficiency and effectiveness**

In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Capital Project delivery, the Capital Projects team have worked alongside the Xentrall team to develop a bespoke project management system within Microsoft Teams. This system, which is known as ProBox will allow a more efficient flow and recording of information. It will feed into the Project Position Statement which is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The system is currently being tested by the Capital Projects team with new projects utilising the system.

Lead Officer: Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Projects

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Review and deliver the workforce strategy**

After a period of careful design and collaboration with key stakeholders on our new workforce strategy and its supporting frameworks, we have completed the staff consultation phase. This important step enabled us to gather valuable insights and perspectives, ensuring employee voices are integral to shaping our future direction. We are now reviewing feedback in advance of progressing to the approval stage, followed by rollout to staff commencing in the summer.

Lead Officer:               Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources  
Core Principle:           Efficient and effective use of resources

**Maximise income through new joint venture companies, increase levels of business rates by growing the local economy; and maximise grant opportunities**

The Council has an ongoing relationship with ESH Homes Ltd to deliver a number of housing sites in the Borough. The parkland for the Blackwell development is complete and the associated housing site is well underway for the delivery of 44 units. The Neasham Road development is progressing well and will deliver circa 200 units and arrangements are progressing with all parties to bring forward a total of 368 units on the Burtree site. Initial feasibility is also underway to bring forward development on the Coniscliffe Road site for circa 80 units.

Lead Officer:               Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection  
Core Principle:           Efficient and effective use of resources

**Explore opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including online delivery**

Following public consultation and consideration by Economy and Resources Scrutiny, the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 was approved by Cabinet on 4 March 2025. This sets a clear direction that helps the council increase its productivity and efficiency through the use of technology. Based around 4 themes and underpinned by a delivery plan, the strategy aims to ensure (1) online services are designed around the needs of the customer, (2) that we maintain an awareness of digital exclusion and use this knowledge to inform our adoption and application of technology, (3) that we raise awareness of our online services and the support available to help people overcome digital exclusion, and (4) that we maximise the benefits of our existing systems and emerging technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) where there is a clear business case to do so.

Implementation of the delivery plan has started. Highlights include a successful campaign raising awareness of our online service; being one of only 25 councils participating in a pilot of an AI tool called MINUTE that has been developed by the Government; we are reviewing all of the pages on the corporate website; a programme to implement Microsoft Teams across the council is well under way; and we are increasing use of productivity tools such as Power BI.

Lead Officer: Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Continue to build strong relationships with partners, residents and communities.**

The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group continues to be an effective way for the Council to engage with the sector. It is working with the Council to deliver Household Support Fund and is supporting the Plan for Neighbourhoods Board.

The Public Sector Executive Group continues to provide a means for the Chief Executive to meet with her counterparts in the other public sector agencies.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Council Plan Priority: Economy

Building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all

### Develop and deliver an inclusive economic growth strategy to create the conditions for businesses and the economy to thrive and provide good work opportunities for residents

An Inclusive Growth Strategy is being developed to set out a clear strategic direction and framework on which to further develop the local economy. The Inclusive Growth Strategy presents:

- a long term approach to enable the fair distribution of economic growth across the Borough
- accessible opportunities for all residents

In May 2025, the first engagement workshop with local employers and key stakeholders took place. This provided an opportunity to understand the challenges, barriers, and opportunities for growth from local employers. This valuable feedback will help shape the development of the Strategy.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes**

A new place-based partnership with stakeholders will form part of the new Plan for Neighbourhoods. The Plan for Neighbourhoods brings together community representatives, business, strategic partners to prioritise funding into areas of local need. Darlington will receive funding and support totalling up to £20m. The Board is now in place and currently includes representatives from retail, hospitality and other businesses within the town centre, and other employers in sub-centres such as Cockerton.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Ensure that the borough is safe, clean and maintained to levels that support the economy and encourage inward investment**

Street Scene continues to sustain levels of cleanliness to high standards within the constraints of available resources. Overall cleanliness of the area following independent auditing confirms an average score of 85% which falls within the 'excellent' category.

Prevention and education measures are used to intervene in problems, with enforcement being a tool that can be used as and when appropriate to help protect the appearance of the town, damage to the environment and public health issues. During this reporting year 467 environmental cases were reported (of which 439 are closed). Some of the results are as follows:

3 x Duty of Care Fixed Penalty Tickets (£1,800)

1 x Duty of Care Fail to pay Fixed Penalty Ticket (Fined £458)

10 x Section 110 Prosecutions (Total Fines £4122)

Prosecutions for Fly Tipping and Waste Management Offences x 2 (Total Fines £2754).

The Council is considering an update the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the town centre (with some revisions) and proposing a Boroughwide PSPO to support activity. This is due to be considered by Cabinet in June.

Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Economy

**Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and TVCA to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes.**

The Council continues to work with employers in the local area to develop good job and career opportunities. Working with individual or clusters of local businesses, they are encouraged to develop their skills pipeline and invest in recruiting and sustaining talent by helping identify the support and training they need. The Council also continues to host the Darlington Jobs Fair, with the last event in February 2025 attracting almost 1000 jobseekers. At the event around 100 employers and support organisations helping people find work, and support in overcoming any barriers to employment. Plans are in place for a Skills Booster event in the summer, and a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) focussed event for school children in the autumn.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

**Provide more education and skills opportunities for residents by delivering the Adult Skills Centre and collaborating with providers and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)**

The Council's Learning & Skills Service and Darlington College are jointly developing an adult skills centre in the old Northern Echo building to provide additional town centre learning opportunities. The planned date for completion of the centre is November 2025.

As part of the government's Getting Britain Working initiative, council staff are working with TVCA, DWP and the DfE, to develop the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer programme, to encourage 18-21 year old into employment, and the Connect to Work programme which supports those with disabilities, long term health issues, or multiple and complex barriers into work. Both of these programmes are expected to start later in 2025 and will be administered by TVCA.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## Work with Market Asset Management to deliver improvements to the historic indoor market

Following the successful completion of Phase 3 works, the market hall has welcomed several exciting new businesses, breathing fresh life into the space. New additions include a traditional Fish & Chip shop, a specialist Italian delicatessen, and a baking school that has transformed the former Millets unit into a creative culinary hub. Over the past year, the market hall has also become a thriving events destination. It played host to the national Up & Running Head Office event, which drew attendance from several international brands, as well as hundreds of runners. The Vault continues to be a popular venue for regular networking events, offering a unique and atmospheric setting for professionals to connect. Meanwhile, the markets team has been busy curating a diverse and vibrant programme of regular markets. These include farmers markets, craft fairs, record markets, and other speciality trading events that attract independent traders from across the region - enhancing the market hall's reputation as a dynamic hub for both commerce and community.

The establishment of an Advisory Board to inform future development and management of the market remains an outstanding item but is in development.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## Accelerate the delivery of key sites to the market to attract private sector investment, including Darlington Science Park, Ingenium Parc and Symmetry Park

The Council continues to work with key stakeholders, investors and individual businesses to attract new investment to Darlington. Over 400,000 sq.ft. of top-tier, sustainable logistics and industrial space is now available in Darlington, thanks to specialist commercial developer Greenbox. The development, on Tornado Way, is a joint venture by Partners Group and Citivale, and comprises of three industrial units boasting EPC 'A' and BREEAM 'Excellent' rated facilities. It is hoped that a tenant for some of this space will be announced soon.

Working with partners from CPI and Teesside University a new marketing and promotion of the remaining sites at Darlington Science Park (formally known as Central Park ) is under development and will complement the wider branding/promotion of opportunities at Darlington Science Park.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy



## **Deliver the Towns Fund projects, including the refurbishment of the Northern Echo building to secure new business occupiers**

The Towns Fund Programme remains in the latter stages of delivery. The refurbishment of the former Northern Echo Building is in progress and the Adult Skills hub is due for completion in November 2025. The upper floors will be complete early 2026. Improvements to shops and public realm along Skinnergate and the Yards together with improvements along Victoria Road continue. The redevelopment of Coniscliffe Road is now complete. The redevelopment of 156 Northgate into office accommodation is underway and the refurbishment of Edward Pease House is in the tender stage. The approach to the management of the Northgate Tower development area is still under review.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Work effectively with Darlington Economic Campus to fully realise the opportunities this investment presents to the town and its communities**

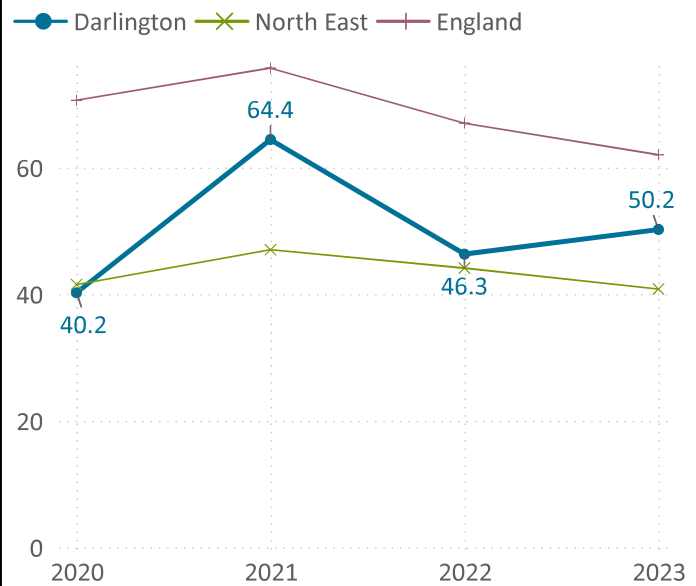
The Council continues to work closely with officers from the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) on a range of activities. The Council has worked with Government Property Agency to complete the necessary planning requirements to enable construction of the new DEC building on Brunswick Street. It is anticipated that this will commence in summer 2025. At a wider engagement level, DEC have played a major role in supporting the Council with the delivery of a number of skills and workforce development events, such as the Darlington Jobs Fair, Skills Booster and STEM activities, promoting the various career opportunities and skills requirements that are available within the civil service in Darlington.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

New business registration rate per 10,000 residents

New business formation rates tend to fluctuate in Darlington year on year. Between 2022 and 2023, the rate increased from 46.3 to 50.2 new business registrations per 10,000 residents. However, the longer term trend is that the rate has fallen since 2018, an overall trend mirrored by both the rates for the North East and England. In 2023, the number of new business registrations per 10,000 residents in Darlington was 50.2, higher than the north east (40.8), but still lower than the England rate of 62.0.



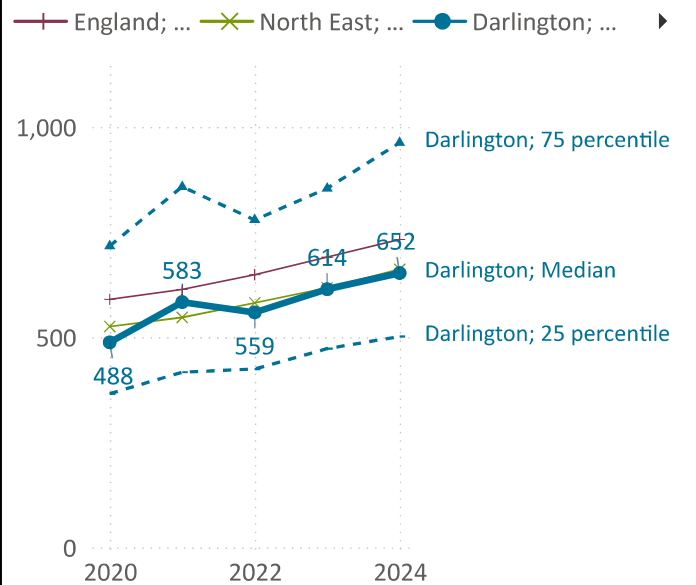
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Develop and deliver an inclusive economic growth strategy to create the conditions for businesses and the economy to thrive and provide good work opportunities for residents

Weekly gross pay for full time workers (Residents)

The resident income graph reveals a skewed distribution, where the median income (652.2) is closer to the lower quartile (501.30), indicating that half of the population earns within a relatively narrow range. Meanwhile, the upper quartile (962.30) is much higher, suggesting a significant income disparity for higher earners. Given these values, the income distribution for residents suggests a substantial spread between lower and upper earners, with a high level of inequality.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

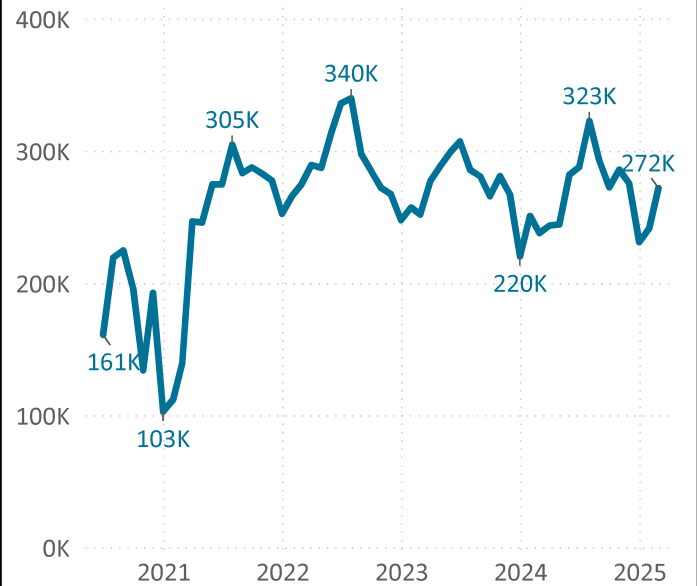
Key Deliverable: Develop and deliver an inclusive economic growth strategy to create the conditions for businesses and the economy to thrive and provide good work opportunities for residents

Town centre footfall weekly average for the month

Footfall in Darlington is following consistent trendlines, with a peak of 322,650 recorded in August 2025. The traditional dip in January was less pronounced compared to 2024. March 2025 footfall also exceeded 2024 levels, reflecting positive momentum and increasing visitor confidence.

Occupancy rates across the town centre are stable at around 85%, supported by the opening of several new businesses, adding to the vibrancy and offer of Darlington.

Ongoing town centre animation and a calendar of events continue to drive increased footfall. These initiatives are designed to encourage visitors to dwell longer, explore a wider range of locations, and enjoy an enhanced overall experience, further boosting activity across Darlington.



Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

Council Plan Priority: Economy

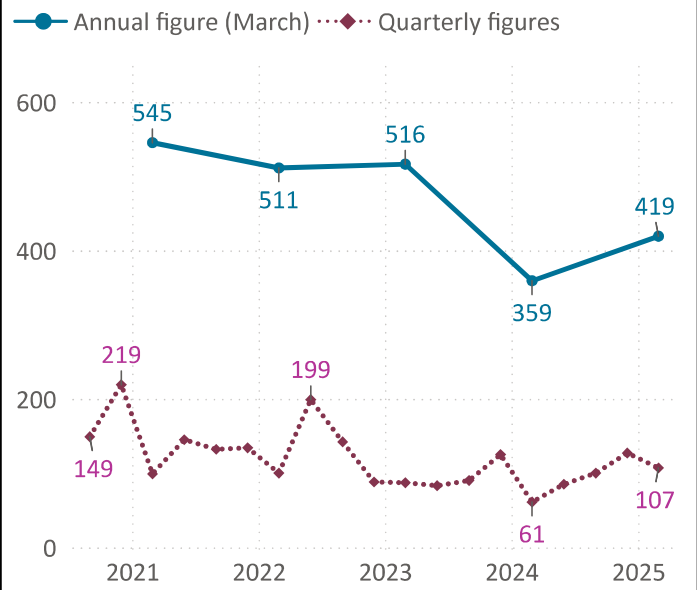
Key Deliverable: Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes

New homes delivered, annually

Housing delivery has seen a significant recovery since the 2023/24 financial year. The previous fall in delivery can be directly attributed to the Nutrient Neutrality (NN) designation affecting the whole Tees Catchment.

Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England NN credit scheme. The Borough has fared well in the proportion of credits allocated to developments in Darlington.

Latest monitoring indicates this recovery trend will continue. Q4 period of 2024/25 saw more construction than in the same quarter in 2023/24. In Q4 of 2024/25, 145 starts were made and 107 units were completed, in Q4 of 2023/24, 74 starts were made and 61 units were completed which represents a significant increase.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

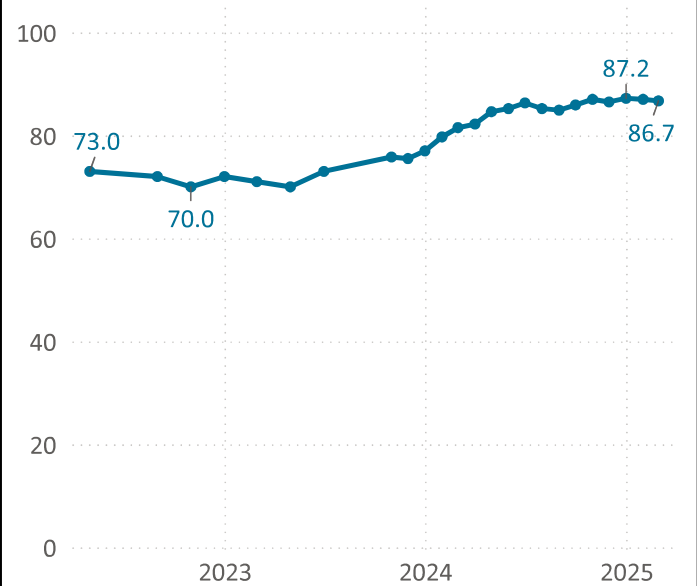
Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes

Land Audit Management System - Litter Score (Environmental Quality Survey)

The Litter Score is a 12 month rolling average percentage score of the 40 transects inspected for litter every month. Two wards are covered each month, in which twenty areas of the ward are inspected. Each ward is covered once within a twelve month period. An inspection scores cleanliness of an area based on the grading system of the Association For Public Service Excellence (APSE). Sites are graded from a grade A to a grade D. A score over 70% represents 'good' performance.

The average pass rate over the last 12 months for litter has increased from 84.9% to 86.7%. As well as litter, the inspections include detritus, weeds, dog fouling, grass, shrubs and hedges, flowerbeds and overflowing public bins. The 12 month average pass rate for all has risen from 82.2% to 84.2%.



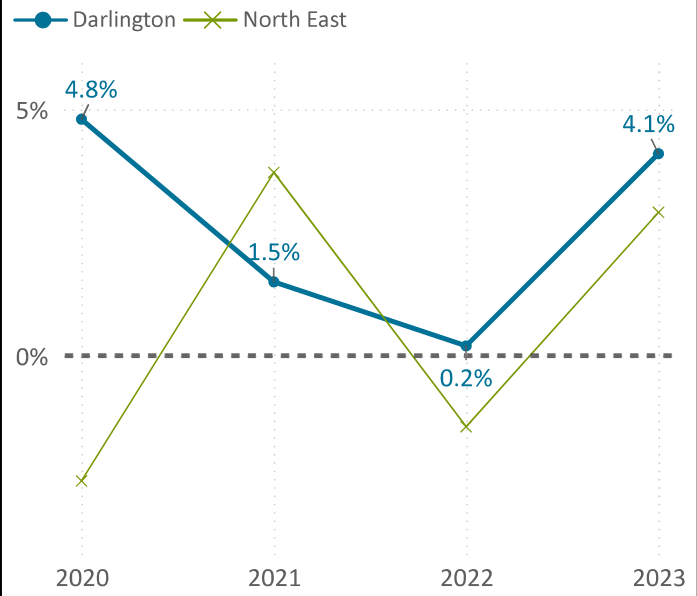
Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Ensure that the borough is safe, clean and maintained to levels that support the economy and encourage inward investment

Change in total employment since previous year

This measure shows the difference in total employment (both Public and Private) compared to the same point 12 months previously, in order to show the number of jobs created in Darlington within the last year. The number of new employment opportunities shows an increase in 2023 to 4.1%, slightly better than the North East regional rate of 2.9%. This measure currently shows that the growth in total employment has now recovered to pre-pandemic levels of 2020 and 2019.



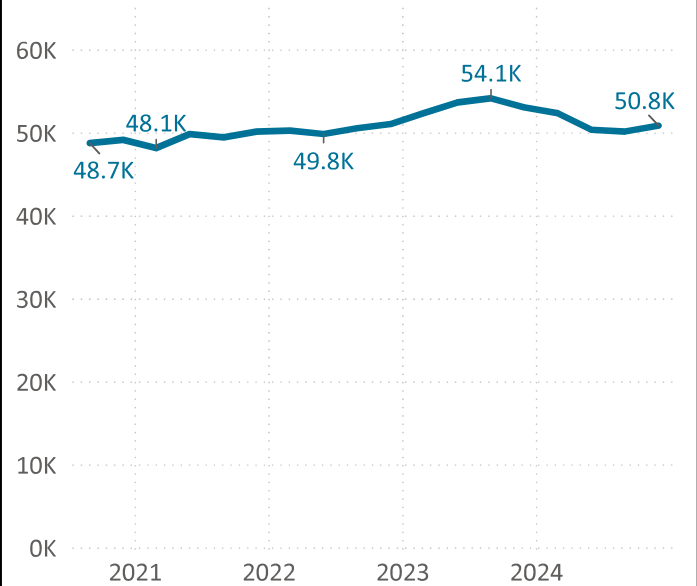
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and TVCA to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes.

Number of people employed including self-employed

As of December 2024, the total number of people employed (including both employees and self-employed individuals) now stands at 50,800. This is a decrease of 2,100 on the same time 12 months previously. The number peaked at 54,100 in September 2023. There's no stand out reason for this decline, and it could be due to a variety of factors such as national economic challenges, shifts in local industries, or broader regional trends. Nevertheless, the long-term trendline (since 2020) demonstrates a gradual increase.



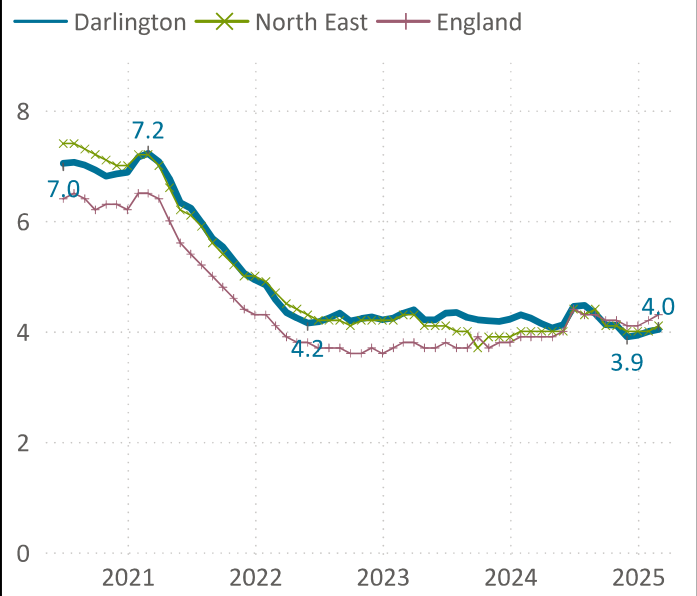
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and TVCA to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes.

Monthly unemployed claimant count (%)

Since mid-2022 to date, the monthly unemployed claimant count in Darlington has remained relatively static - a trend which is mirrored in national and regional statistics. The claimant count in March 2025 now stands at 4.0%. The rate in Darlington is slightly below both the regional (4.1%) and national (4.3%) rates. The static nature of this measure can be attributed to several factors, including economic inactivity, post-pandemic labour market mismatches and economic uncertainty.



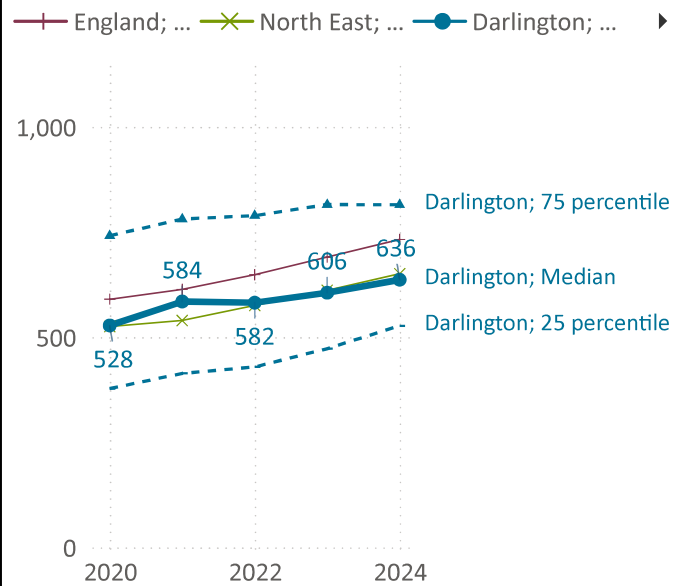
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and TVCA to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes.

Weekly gross pay for full time workers (Employees)

The employee income graph shows moderate variability, where the median income (£636.30) is closer to the lower quartile (£526.80), but the upper quartile (£814.70) is higher, but not significantly. This means the middle 50% of earners (between £526.80 and £814.70) demonstrate only moderate wages differences. As the employee median is closer to the lower quartile than the upper quartile, this shows that lower earners are more clustered, while upper income earners have more variation.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and TVCA to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes.

## Council Plan Priority: Homes

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

**Review and refresh the preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, working with partners to ensure the provision of the right support and services to help people avoid homelessness and support those who are**

A new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2025-30 was developed with our partners and stakeholders in 2024 and a full public consultation was undertaken in November 2024. The strategy was then considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2025, before approval by Cabinet in March 2025. Our key priorities in the strategy are:

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

In particular, the priorities for 2025-26 will be the establishment of a multi-agency homelessness forum and undertaking actions to reduce the use of hotels and bed and breakfasts, for temporary accommodation.

Progress against the strategy will be formally reviewed by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee in 2026.

Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## **Review our approach to empty homes across the borough so more quality homes are available**

According to Government data (October 2024) there were 1921 empty properties on the database. This equates to approximately 3% of all properties registered.

At this time there was 666 long-term empty homes, those dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over six months.

The Council does not have a dedicated resource to deal with empty homes, service requests are currently received from several sections of the council using various pieces of legislation. While planning and environment legislation have been used on several occasions, the complexity of housing legislation has been less employed.

The use of legislation may address a particular problem in time it does not necessarily address the fundamental issue of the property being vacant, however the number of problematic long-term empty properties has been found to be very low.

A review of empty homes and the legislation used by each section of the Council will be carried out and a report will be produced to detail developing a council approach to empty homes and the resources required for recommended changes.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## **Support the delivery of more social houses and supported accommodation by building more council homes and working with other social landlords and charities**

Our Council housing new build site at Neasham Road will deliver 150 new homes, including 130 affordable rented properties, 19 rent to buy properties and one property for Children's Services. The first 40 homes have already been completed with tenants moved in by March 2025. Further phases will be released during 2025 and 2026, with the site due for completion by mid-2026. The scheme has been partly funded by Homes England, with a grant of £7.35 million.

Our Council housing new build site at Sherborne Close (phase 2) commenced in July 2024 and will deliver 14 new homes, including 11 affordable rented properties, 2 rent to buy properties and one property for Children's Services. Completion of the site is due in September 2025. The scheme has been partly funded by Homes England, with a grant of £0.91 million.

Our Council housing site at Skinnergate is due to commence in 2025, following demolition of the existing commercial buildings. The site will deliver new shops and 16 new homes, all of which will be affordable rented properties, and is due to be completed in 2026. A bid for Homes England funding is currently being made and we are expecting a grant of £1.12 million to help fund the project.

Further Council housing new build schemes are currently being worked up to increase the availability of social housing in Darlington to help meet additional demand, with over 2,000 households currently registered on our waiting list.

Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Council Plan Priority: Homes



## **Develop and deliver a new homes strategy, to address housing need, including ensuring social and affordable homes across the borough, in accordance with the Local Plan**

The draft New Homes Strategy has been prepared and is currently under review from Cabinet Members. A meeting has been arranged for 28th May for final review prior to a report being presented to Cabinet in July seeking approval for a wider consultation.

Following consultation, the Strategy will be reviewed and returned to Cabinet and Council for approval hopefully by the end of the year.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## **Continue to improve the quality of housing through healthy home design principles and ensuring developers create greater energy efficiency in new homes**

The Council is still awaiting the Government's consideration on Future Homes Standards and changes to Building Regulations as it is still not clear how Planning Authorities can exceed Building Regulation requirements. The Council will continue to monitor Government announcements and advise Members when the situation is clear. The Council may be able to alter planning policy in the review of the Local Plan depending on Government advice.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## Continue investment in Council housing to ensure quality and greater energy efficiency

Improving the energy efficiency of our Council homes is a key priority for the council and work is ongoing to achieve the Government targets of all properties rated as Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C or above by 2030 and net zero carbon by 2050, as set out in our approved Housing Services Climate Change Strategy.

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) wave 1 has already scheme delivered external and cavity wall insulation, Air Source Heat Pumps, loft insulation and solar panels to 23 Council homes using £0.24 million of Government funding and £0.28 million of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital expenditure.

SHDF wave 2 commenced in September 2024 and is due to complete in June 2025. The scheme is delivering external and cavity wall insulation, solar panels, loft insulation, double glazing, and low energy lighting to 130 Council homes using £1.27 million of Government funding and £1.27 million of HRA capital expenditure.

In March 2025 we were successful in bidding for £3.5m Government funding as part of the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund wave 3. This scheme will deliver upgrades to approximately 1,600 Council homes over a three year period, using the Government funding and HRA capital expenditure. Delivery of SHDF wave 3 is expected to significantly increase the percentage of Council homes rated as EPC C or above, which is currently 54%.

Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## Ensure effective use of the Disabled Facilities Grant to enable people to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible.

The Disabled Facilities Grant process continues to include a risk prioritisation tool to ensure those in most urgent need of the grant due to risk are prioritised within the application process and timescales. This is monitored through bi-monthly meetings. An Equality Impact Assessment was completed with no adverse impacts as individuals waiting for grant applications will be provided with appropriate advice or support. All individuals have regular communication from Adult Services to update on their position

Lead Officer: Christine Shields: Assistant Director - Commissioning, Performance & Transformation

Council Plan Priority: Homes

**Introduce additional licensing for homes of multiple occupation, a voluntary landlords charter and work towards the introduction of selective licencing in areas with a high number of private rented sector homes**

Office of National Statistics data indicates that Darlington’s private rented stock is at 20.77%, higher than the national average and the highest in the Tees Valley region.

The regulation of rented properties and property management is carried out by several organisations in addition to Darlington Borough Council.

Following a review of existing and proposed legislation the following schemes will be investigated -

- A voluntary landlords charter
- The introduction of additional licensing for homes of multiple occupation
- Introduction of selective licencing in areas with a high number of private rented sector homes

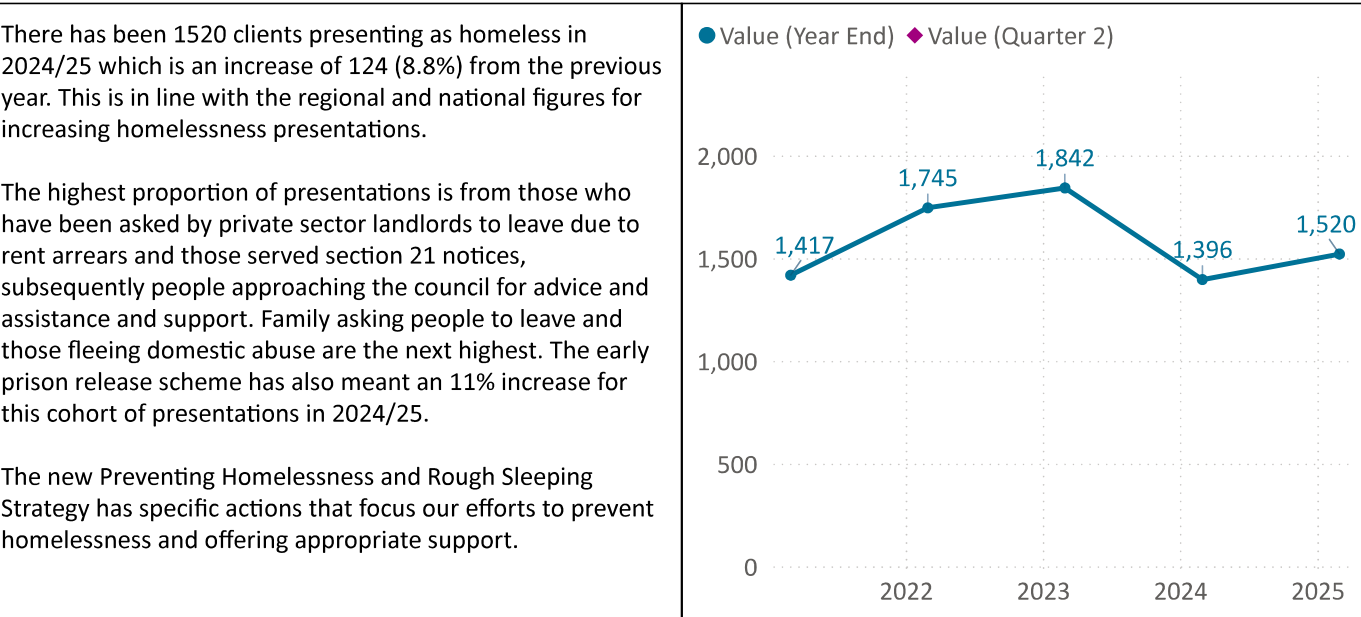
The Renters’ Rights Bill is expected to be introduced in 2025 which will have a significant impact on these proposed schemes.

A report has been produced highlighting the development of the Council’s approach to its responsibilities for enforcement of the private rented sector, in line with the introduction of the Renters’ Rights Bill. This report will be updated following the Bill’s introduction to detail the resources required for the changes to be implemented.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes

**Number of people presented to Darlington Council's Homeless service**



Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

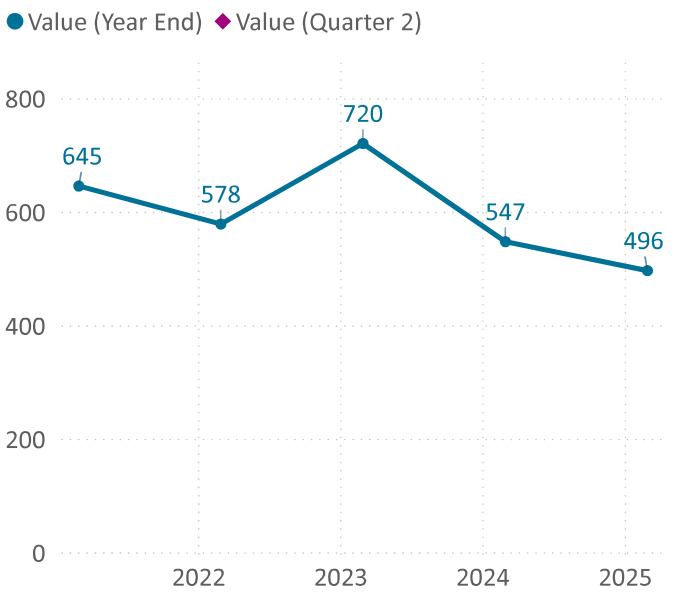
Council Plan Priority: Homes

Key Deliverable: Review and refresh the preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, working with partners to ensure the provision of the right support and services to help people avoid homelessness and support those who are

Number of positive outcomes where homelessness has been prevented

Positive outcomes where homelessness has been prevented has reduced by 9.3% this year, in comparison with 2023-24. However we have still seen 496 positive outcomes where the Housing Options team have strived to find long-term solutions for their clients.

The slight reduction in positive outcomes is due to a number of factors including homeless cases being open for longer, as there are delays in moving clients on from temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation and increasing demands on the social and private housing waiting lists with options for move on becoming more difficult. This is also reflected in the increased times spent in temporary accommodation.



Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

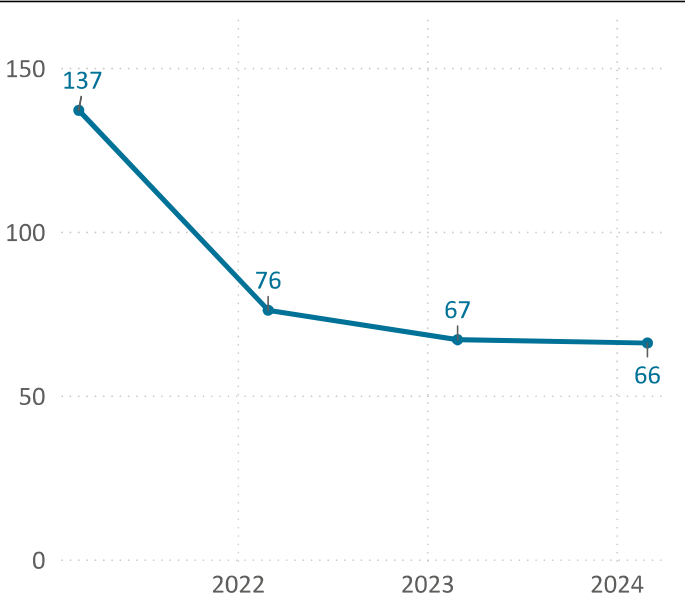
Council Plan Priority: Homes

Key Deliverable: Review and refresh the preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, working with partners to ensure the provision of the right support and services to help people avoid homelessness and support those who are

Additional Affordable Housing Supply - Completions

This annual figure is obtained from the Government "Live Tables on Affordable Housing Supply". The figure for this year will not be published until about November 2025.

The Council's Housing new build programme was significantly disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and then the Nutrient Neutrality announcement, with very few properties completed in 2021/22 and 2022/23. The most recent 2023/24 figure (66) is hopefully indicating this decline is slowing. In addition to delivery from the private sector as part of delayed planning permissions, work is continuing on Snipe Lane which will see further delivery of affordable council owned units in the near future.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

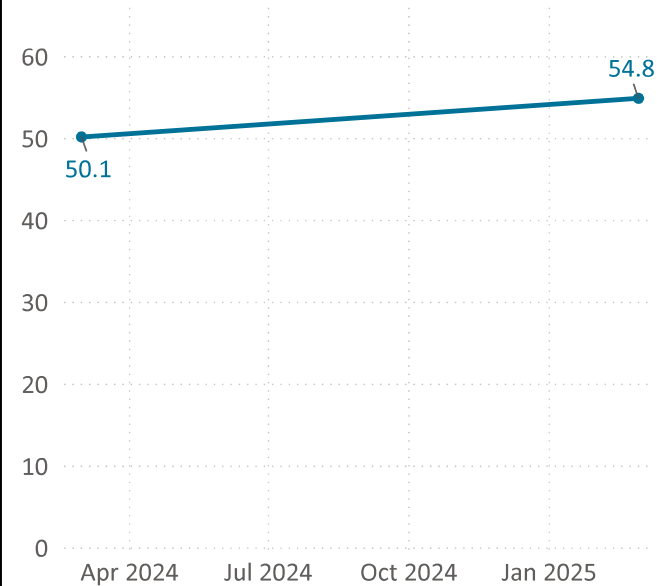
Council Plan Priority: Homes

Key Deliverable: Develop and deliver a new homes strategy, to address housing need, including ensuring social and affordable homes across the borough, in accordance with the Local Plan

Percentage of Council properties at EPC C and above

We currently have 54.8% of council dwellings with an EPC graded C or above which is an increase of 4.7 percentage points from the same period last year (50.1%).

This increase is primarily due to successful grant funded works being completed in council homes. Work is ongoing, with a large number of the properties already upgraded and improved via the grant funding in 2024/25. These properties have not yet been regraded, so we anticipate this trend to continue upwards.



Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Council Plan Priority: Homes

Key Deliverable: Continue investment in Council housing to ensure quality and greater energy efficiency

## Council Plan Priority: Living well

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

### **Continue to develop joint working with the NHS and key partners to support people to lead healthier lives, stay in their homes for longer and reduce hospital stays**

Adults Services and Commissioning Teams continue to work with the Integrated Care Board and NHS Foundation Trusts to develop, maintain and deliver joint approaches to health and social care for people with care and support needs in Darlington. We have established a task and finish group to review the intermediate care offer and this continues to meet. It is currently reviewing best practice across the region and is developing option appraisals to share with Partners. We continue to have quarterly collaboration meeting with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) and are working with the Trust and the 4 other Tees valley local authorities on exploring discharge hub models.

Lead Officer: Christine Shields: Assistant Director - Commissioning, Performance & Transformation

Council Plan Priority: Living well

## **Health and Wellbeing Board to agree and deliver a new strategy to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities, and lead the creation of a health and wellbeing network**

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which has a clear focus on improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities was published in December 2024. Implementation of the Strategy is being monitored by the Health and Wellbeing Board through an annual review and scheduled multiagency 'deep dives' examining 2 of the 4 themes of the Strategy each year. This will monitor actions and identify any risks, gaps or areas for action. This will also allow the Health and Wellbeing Board to receive assurance around the key performance indicators in the Strategy.

Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

Council Plan Priority: Living well

## **Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity**

The development of public health strategies are informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which provides a summary of the local health needs in Darlington, including an understanding of health inequalities. The Physical Activity Strategy has been approved. The Healthy Weight Plan, Oral Health Promotion Strategy and local suicide prevention plan are also being developed with local stakeholders.

Strategic priorities and actions on domestic abuse and sexual violence continue to be driven through the County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG), which is a partnership board. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy is currently being refreshed in partnership with Durham County Council. The review of the needs assessment is to be completed. A multi agency Domestic Abuse Local Working Group has also been established, to develop actions for achieving compliance with local authority duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021,

The local delivery plan for drugs and alcohol are monitored through the governance arrangements of the County Durham and Darlington Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership which is chaired by the PCC. The additional funding for drug and alcohol treatment services, inpatient detox and employment services have been continued for a further year, until end of March 2026 with a separate monitoring and assurance framework managed by OHID.

Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

Council Plan Priority: Living well

## Widen participation in recreation and leisure facilities including the Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex

Following the reopening of the full pool complex at the Dolphin Centre in August 2024, we have continued to see a rise in footfall with the popular introduction of the toddler pool and return of the slides. Swimming lessons are accommodating over 900 children each week, with school lessons also averaging 500 pupils per week in term time. The school holidays that have fallen between quarter 3 and 4 have proven to be very successful with October and February both breaking previous years' records in terms of footfall and income.

Membership numbers continue to rise with the centre recording their highest overall numbers. Darlington College has extended their partnership with us by offering staff memberships on top of their current student membership contract. Due to the reputation of our Christmas party nights, we held another four successful events in December followed by further re-booked events such as Stronger community Awards, Mixed Martial Arts and White-Collar Boxing to name a few.

Eastbourne Sports Complex's new facilities and investment has proven a great success with the pitches being at full capacity on an evening with partner clubs. The team are now exploring funding options to improve the wider grass pitches that would support a further increase of visits to the site.

Lead Officer: Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

Council Plan Priority: Living well

## Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

The work of the transformation plan is ongoing. In this quarter we have undergone an inspection through the Care Quality Commission who have rated the Local Authority in relation to compliance to the Care Act Part one as Good, with an overall score of 73%. The report highlights numerous strengths, including:

- A consistent, strength-based assessment programme.
- Effective hospital discharge arrangements and reablement services.
- High satisfaction among unpaid carers.
- A responsive and person-centred approach from social workers.
- Strong multi-agency partnerships and a commitment to continuous improvement demonstrated by a clear transformation programme.

The service continue on a monthly basis to review the transformation plan to ensure we continue to meet the objectives of service improvement, efficiencies, effective use of resources and meeting statutory regulations. A reviewed transformation plan will be developed taking into account any further areas for development outlined in the Care Quality Commission inspection report.

Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Council Plan Priority: Living well



## **Shape a sustainable and accountable care market which delivers support focussed on promoting, regaining and maintaining people's independence and wellbeing**

The Commissioning, Contract and Brokerage team are responsible for shaping and sustaining the local care market. They have worked with operational colleagues and partners across health, housing and the VCSE sector to develop a Market Position Statement and Commissioning Strategy with an associated Accommodation with Care and Support Needs Strategy (Adults) and a Sufficiency Statement (Children). These documents provide information about the care market in Darlington which will enable providers to understand the local context, how this is likely to change over the next couple of years and where development opportunities might arise in the future particularly those which support us to prevent, reduce, and delay care and support needs. The documents are for both existing and prospective providers and will support the delivery of both the Council Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Government grant funding has been allocated to care and support providers with the aim of addressing key pressures and challenges.

Outcome based contracts have been relet or retendered across key areas of service provision including homecare, residential care and supported living. A review of Day Opportunities provision will be undertaken in 2025 in preparation for retendering the contract in early 2026.

Lead Officer: Christine Shields: Assistant Director - Commissioning, Performance & Transformation

Council Plan Priority: Living well

## **Develop an Adult Social Care engagement strategy to ensure people requiring care and support, and their carers, are involved in service development and commissioning activity**

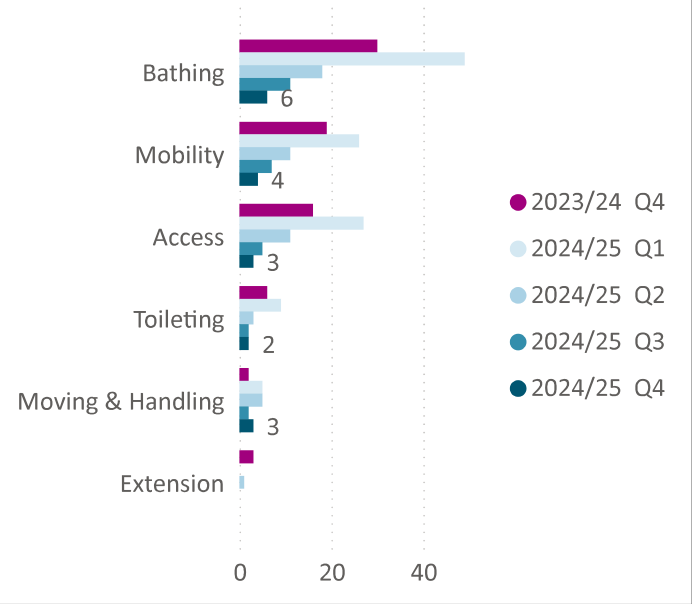
The engagement and co-production strategy- "Stronger Together" is completed. The Care Quality Commission undertook an inspection in January 2025 and acknowledged the work Adult Services are undertaking to ensure improved engagement, inclusion and communication with people who use services. The work is continuing with recent work with Partners in Health and Care on Diversity by Design project to self assess people's current level of involvement and support the development of an engagement and co-production action plan to support the strategy. One of the actions to undertake the development of an all age Autism Strategy has been initiated by the the forming of steering group with partners and although in early stage will be led and co-produced with the voluntary sector and people with lived experience.

Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Major adaptations by type (quarterly)

There have been a total of 45 major works completed during the final 2 quarters of the year. This is a significant reduction compared to the first half of the year when 165 major works had been completed. A new procedure for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) requests is now in place. The new system ensures that DFG monies are utilised in the most appropriate way. A risk prioritisation approach has been introduced to assess the urgency of need of each referral.



Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

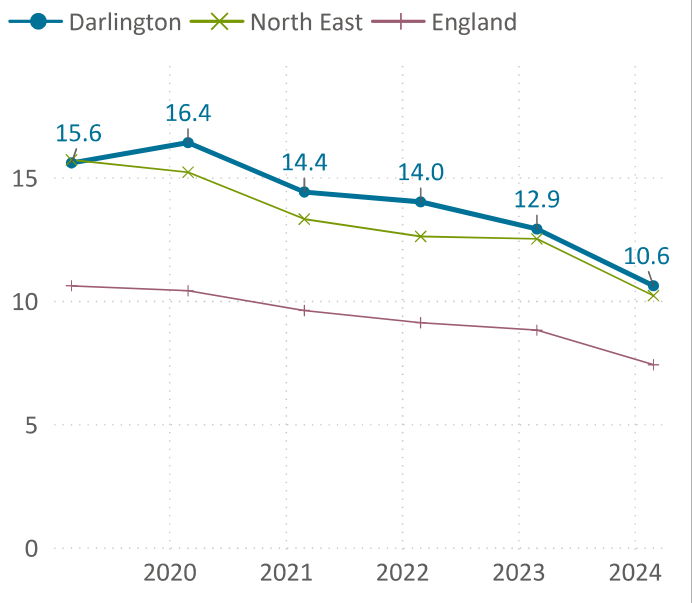
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Continue to develop joint working with the NHS and key partners to support people to lead healthier lives, stay in their homes for longer and reduce hospital stays

Percentage of women who smoke at time of delivery

The latest data from 2023/24 shows that only 10.6% of mothers are known to be smokers at the time of delivery. This has been reducing every years since 2020 with Darlington statistically similar to the North East and statistically worse than England. The gap between Darlington and the North East and England has narrowed since 2020.

Stop Smoking support is provided by the NHS provides through local maternity services and the Council, which commissions a specialist stop smoking service that supports women to stop smoking before and after being pregnant. There is new investment into stop smoking services to target extra support to more pregnant women quit smoking at every opportunity.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

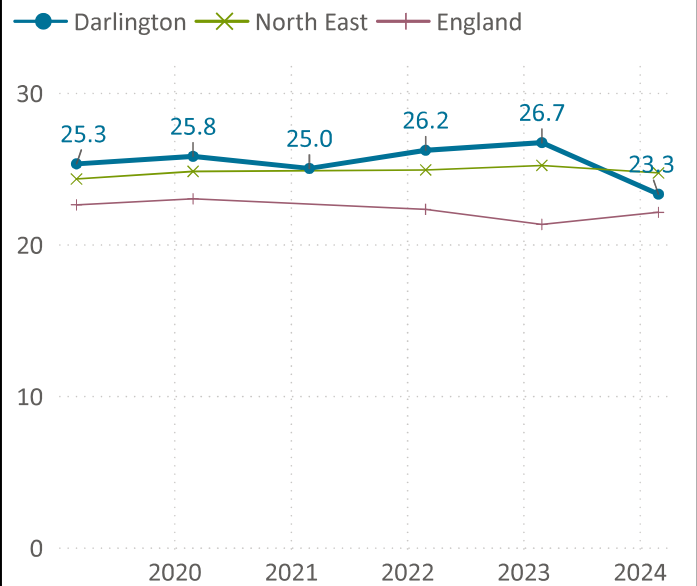
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Excess weight among Reception pupils (%)

The latest data from 2023/24 shows that 23.3% of reception children aged 4-5 years that were measured were found to be overweight or obese. This has reduced from the last period with Darlington is now statistically similar to the North East and England.

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



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

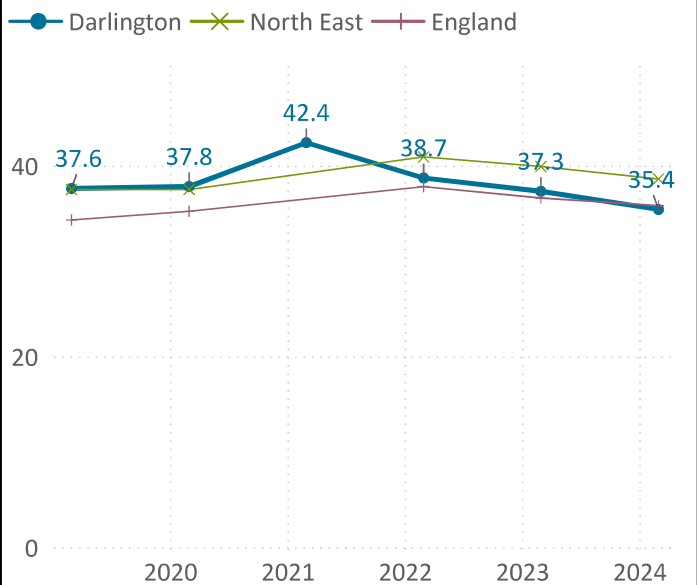
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Excess weight among Year 6 pupils (%)

The latest data from 2023/24 shows that 35.4% of Year 6 children aged 10-11 years who were measured were found to be overweight or obese. There has reduced each year since 2021, with Darlington statistically better than the North East and statistically similar to England.

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



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

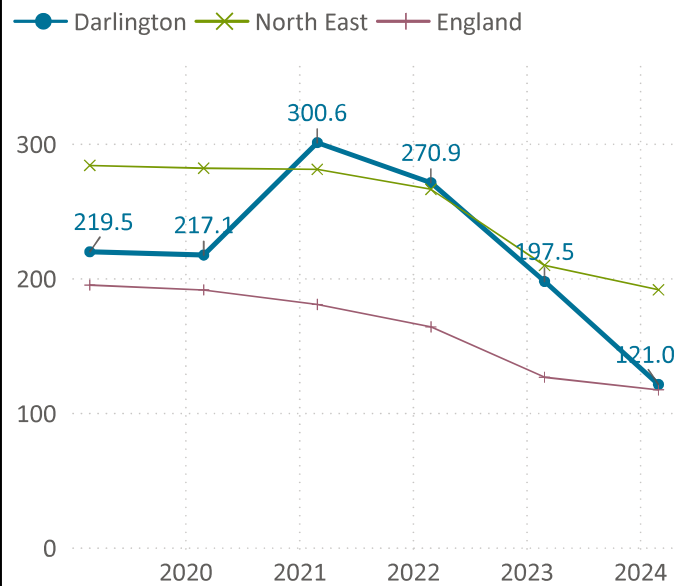
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Emergency Hospital Admissions for Intentional Self-Harm (per 100,000 population)

The latest data for 2024, a rate of 121 per 100,000, which is statistically similar to England and is statistically better than the North East. This data also shows a decreasing trend for Darlington from 2021.

Self-harm is a complex and poorly understood act with varied reasons for a person to harm themselves, irrespective of the purpose of the act. There is a significant and persistent risk of future suicide following an episode of self-harm. This indicator is a measure of intentional self-harm events severe enough to warrant hospital admission and not a measure of the actual prevalence of severe self-harm.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

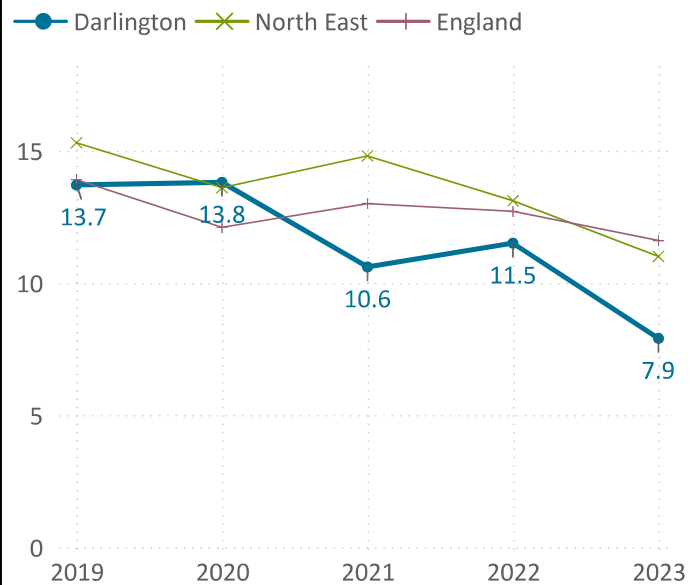
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Prevalence of smoking among persons aged 18+ years

This latest data from the 2023 Annual Population Survey (APS) shows that 7.9% of those who responded aged 18+ self-reported themselves as smokers in Darlington. This is the 3rd year with a reduction from a peak of 13.8% in 2020. Darlington is statistically better than the North East and England.

There is now an established downward trend with fewer people in Darlington identifying themselves as smokers. It is expected that this reduction will be sustained due to the impact of new and existing measures to reduce smoking in the community, including new legislation and extra funding to increase access to stop smoking interventions.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

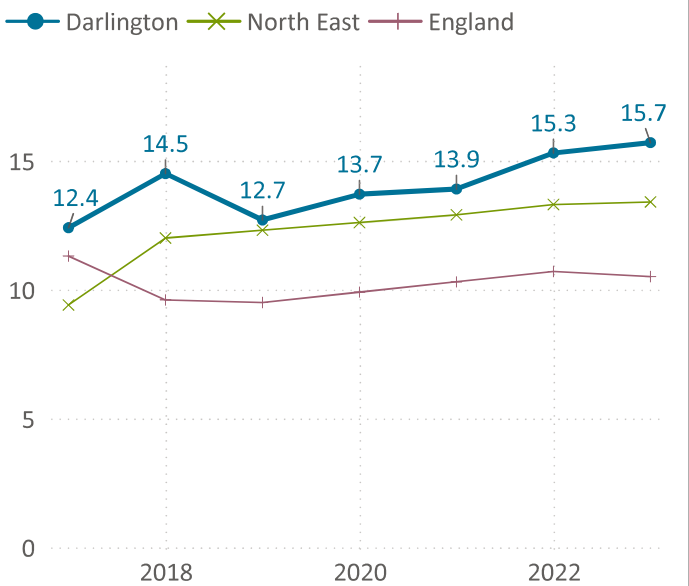
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Inequality in life expectancy at birth (male)

Inequality in life expectancy at birth for males in Darlington has widened in 2023, from 15.3 (2022) to 15.7 years, and is statistically worse than England and the North East.

The Public Health team is working with partners including the NHS to put into place evidence based interventions to tackle the wider determinants of health that contribute to health inequalities. Examples include the commissioning of NHS Health Checks, developing a Food Partnership and work to develop a suicide prevention plan for Darlington.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

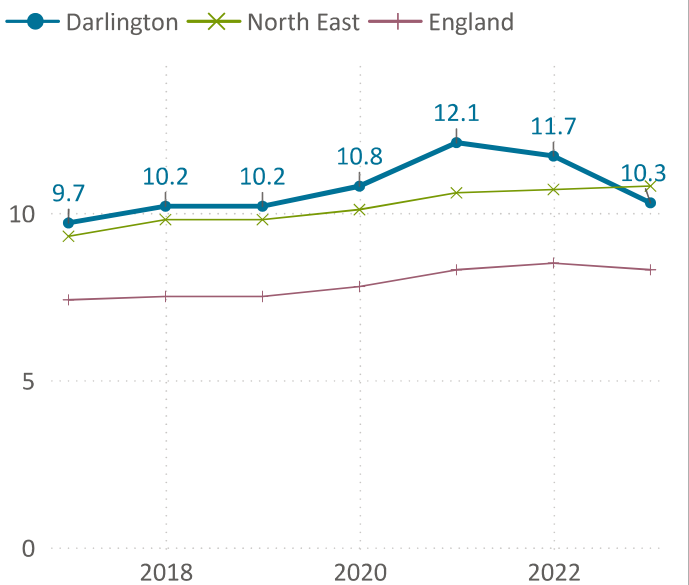
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Inequality in life expectancy at birth (female)

Inequality in life expectancy at birth for females in Darlington has narrowed in 2023, from 11.7 in 2022 to 10.3 years, and is statistically similar to England and the North East.

The Public Health team is working with partners including the NHS to put into place evidence based interventions to tackle the wider determinants of health that contribute to health inequalities. Examples include the commissioning of NHS Health Checks, targeted work to increase the uptake of screening and reduce smoking in women.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

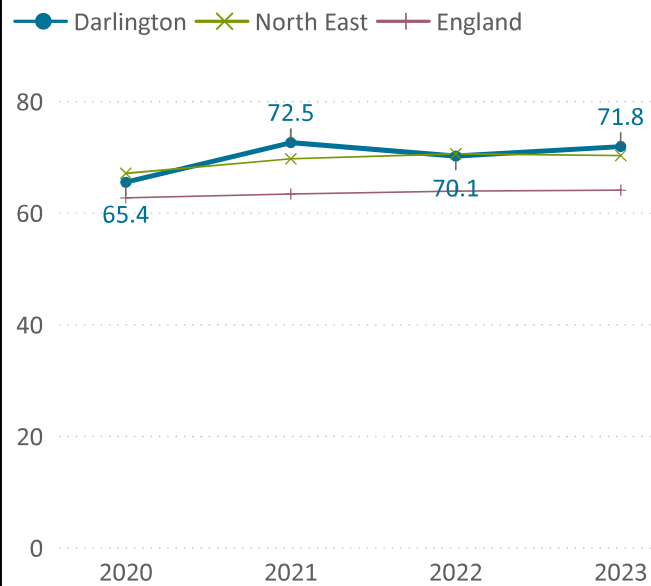
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Overweight (including obesity) prevalence in adults (18+ yrs)

This data from the responses to the 2022/23 sample of the Active Lifestyles Survey estimates an increase in the rate of prevalence of overweight (including obesity) in adults in Darlington to 71.8% . Darlington is statistically similar to the North East, but worse than England.

The causes of obesity are complex and it is associated with reduced life expectancy and is a risk factor for a range of chronic diseases. There are significant health inequalities in relation to the prevalence of obesity in Darlington with some communities more affected than others. The Public Health team is working together with key partners to develop a system-wide approach to addressing these inequalities.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

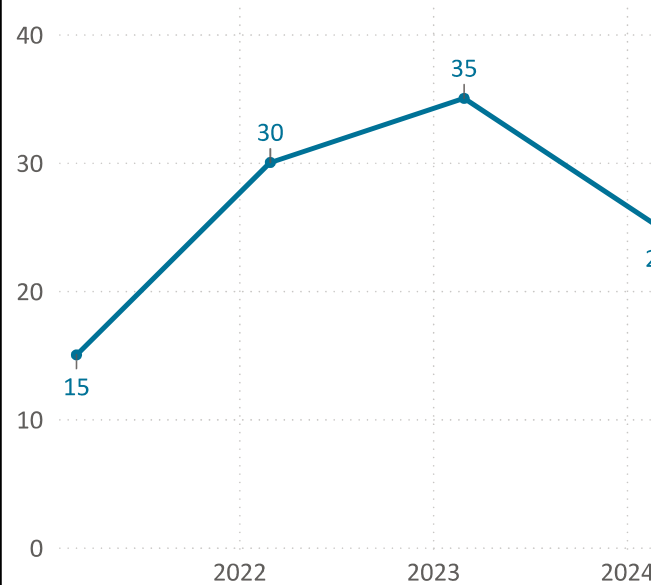
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Young people (under 18) in treatment for substance use alcohol

Recent data for 2023/24 shows a decline in the number of young individuals under 18 receiving treatment for alcohol-related substance use, compared to 2022/23.

The Public Health team commissions treatment and recovery services for Darlington, and there is a specialist service for young people. There has been work with partners, including education, youth offending, and probation, to increase the number of referrals into the system and targeted work with the provider to reduce barriers for young people to access and engage with services. The Public Health team works with partners, including schools and parents, through PHSE in promoting safer drinking messages for young people.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

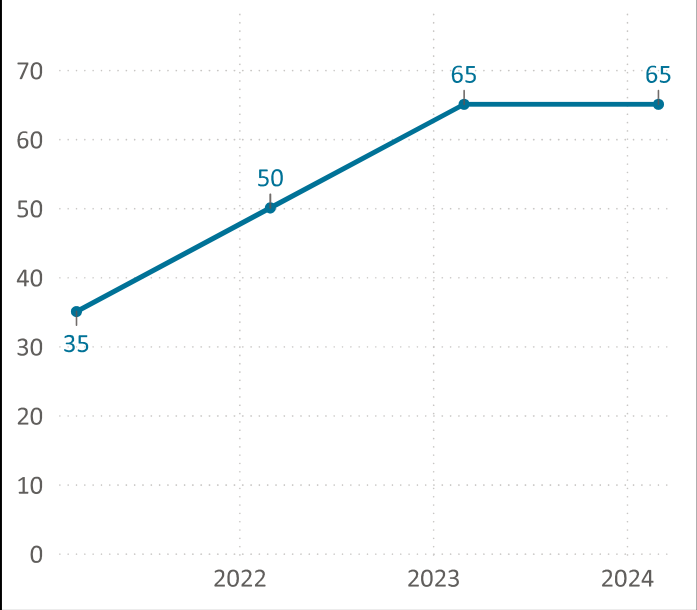
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Young people (under 18) in treatment for substance use drugs

Recent data for 2023/24 indicates the same number of young individuals under 18 who are in treatment for drug-related substance use.

The Public Health team commissions treatment and recovery services for Darlington, and there is a specialist service for young people. There has been work with partners, including education, youth offending, and probation, to increase the number of referrals into the system as well as targeted work with the provider to reduce barriers for young people to access and engage with treatment services. The Public Health team works with partners, including schools, police, and parents, to deliver prevention messages and programmes for young people.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

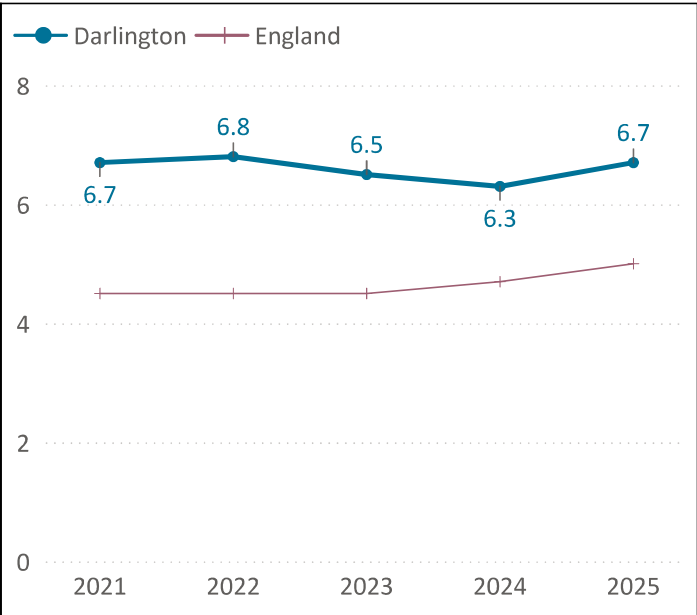
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Adults in treatment at specialist drug misuse service (per 1,000 population)

Recent data for 2024/25 indicates an improvement in the number of adults in treatment at specialist drug misuse services, with 6.7 per 1,000 currently in treatment. This is higher than the rate for England at 5 per 1000 and similar to the NE average.

The Public Health team is working with partners and local providers to continue to work to make high quality and effective services available and accessible to people in Darlington. This has included recent work with local GPs to provide a specialist in-reach offer for their patients so that they can access services more quickly. Other work includes quicker access to triage and assessment, reducing waiting times for treatment.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

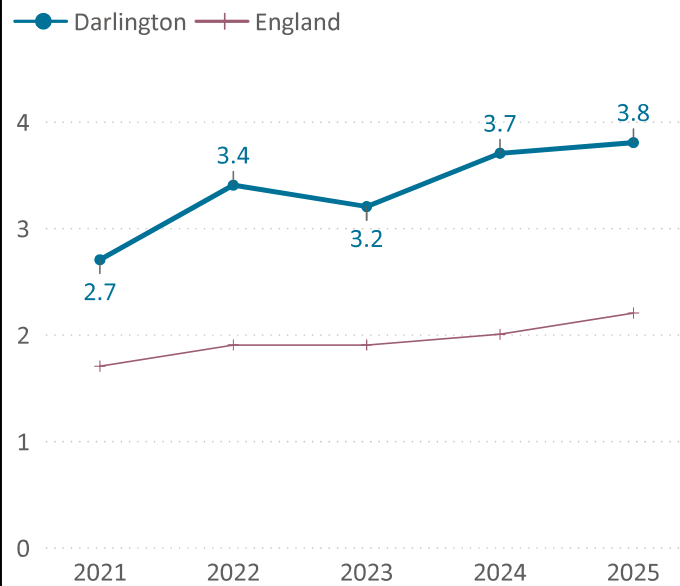
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Adults in treatment at specialist alcohol misuse service (per 1,000 population)

Recent data for 2024/25 indicates an improvement in adults in treatment at specialist alcohol misuse services, with 3.8 per 1,000 currently in treatment. This is better than the England average and similar to the NE average.

The Public Health team is working with partners and providers to continue to provide quality and effective treatment and recovery services for people in Darlington. This has included reducing barriers to accessing services with the provider improving the assessment and triage processes to ensure more timely access to treatment for those seeking help. Work continues with a broad range of prevention activities including supporting national and regional campaigns.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

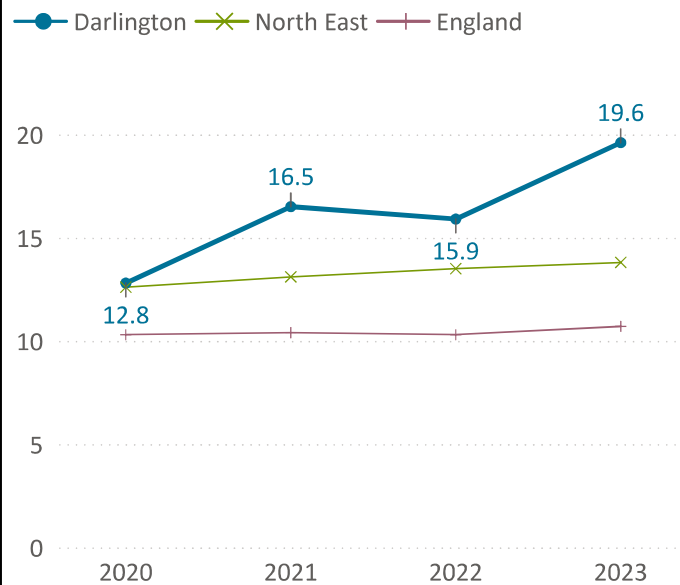
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Suicide rate (per 100,000 population, 10+ yrs)

Recent statistics from 2023 indicate that the suicide rate for Darlington has increased to 19.6 per 100,000 individuals, This figure is the highest when compared to both England and the North East region.

Work is underway with partners to develop a suicide prevention plan for Darlington, coordinating actions across the borough. The public health team, Integrated Care Board (ICB), mental health trust TEWV, and others are building a local intelligence system to identify trends and risk factors. The ICB has also commissioned a regional support programme for families bereaved by suicide.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

Council Plan Priority: Living well

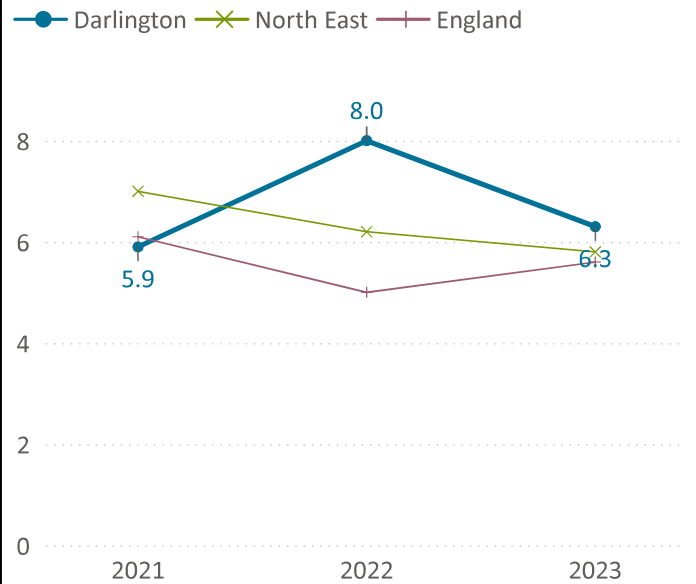
Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity



## Self-reported wellbeing: people with a low satisfaction score (percentage of respondents)

This indicator reflects the percentage of respondents to the national Integrated Household Survey who rated their overall life satisfaction as low. The most recent data from 2022/23, indicates that there has been a reduction in those reporting a low score with 6.3% of respondents now reported a low satisfaction score regarding their wellbeing. This is statistically similar to England and the North East.

The authority is working with a broad range of stakeholders to address the wider determinants of health and some specific targeted actions and plans address improving mental and physical health as well as wider economic and social determinants of health including access to work.



Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

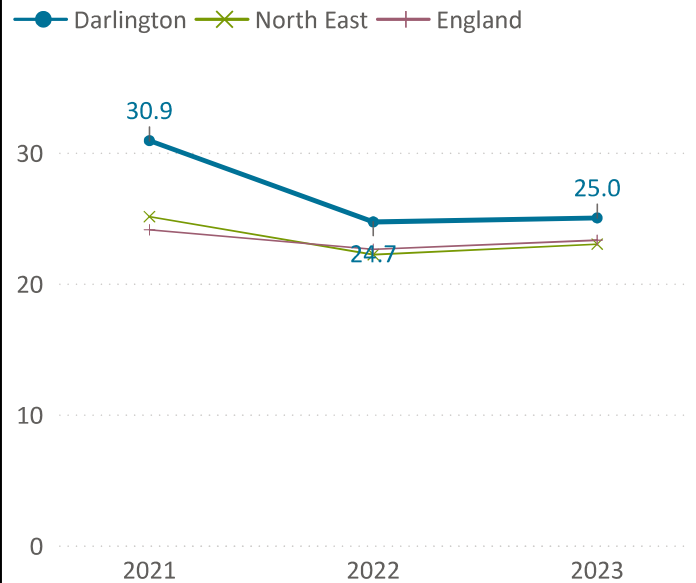
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

## Self reported wellbeing: people with a high anxiety score (percentage of respondents)

The most recent data from the National Household Survey shows that 25% of respondents in Darlington reported a high anxiety score which has reduced from a peak in July 2021. This is statistically similar to the England and North East, averages.

The authority continues to work with a range of stakeholders to put into place plans and programmes to reduce community stresses and anxiety. This includes actions in improving public mental health and community safety. Other targeted programmes to reduce isolation and community cohesion and connectiveness are also being delivered with partners including the Police, Police and Crime Commissioner and NHS.



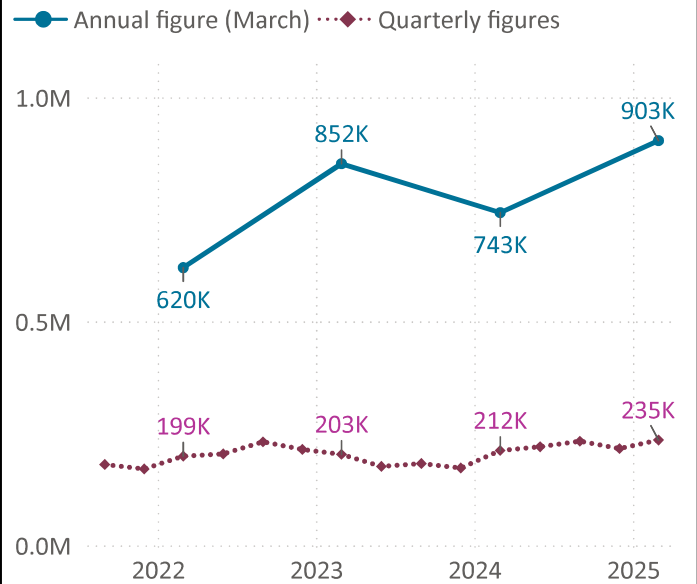
Lead Officer: Lorraine Hughes: Director of Public Health

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities, including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity

Total number of visits to the Dolphin Centre (all areas)

Visits to the centre have continued to grow since Quarter 2 with the toddler pool and slides reopening in September 2024, and two very successful half term holidays in October 2024 and February 2025. All quarters are showing higher levels of participation in the centre facilities in comparison to 2023/2024. Memberships have continued to grow, hospitality has continued to thrive and further growth has been experienced in racket sports and swimming lessons. 2024/2025 has been an extremely busy year in the Dolphin Centre.



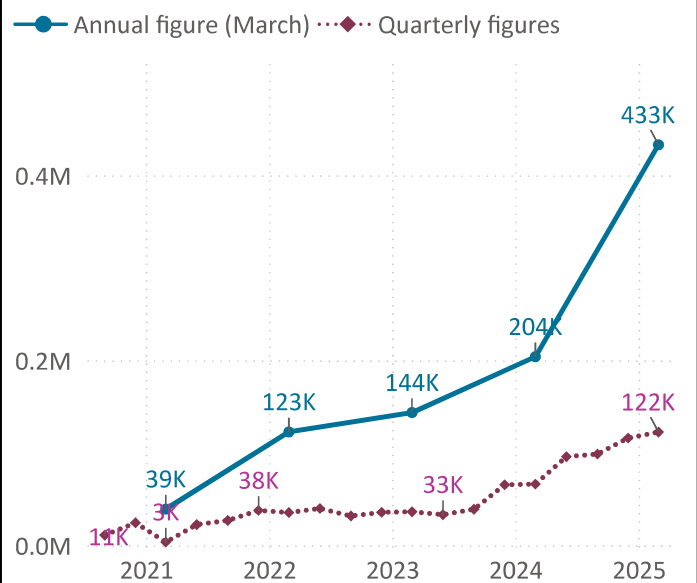
Lead Officer: Lisa Soderman: Head of Leisure

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Widen participation in recreation and leisure facilities including the Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex

Total attendances at Eastbourne Sports Complex

Attendances at Eastbourne Sports Complex has increased following the recent capital project that included the refurbishment of the athletics track and the addition of a stadia specification artificial grass pitch on site. This has had a significant impact on numbers due to now having 9 local football clubs utilising the site for training and fixtures, supporting the increase in footfall for girls, boys and adults. The site has also had an increase in school games events and a full diverse range of activities on site in the multi activity room delivered by the Move More team.



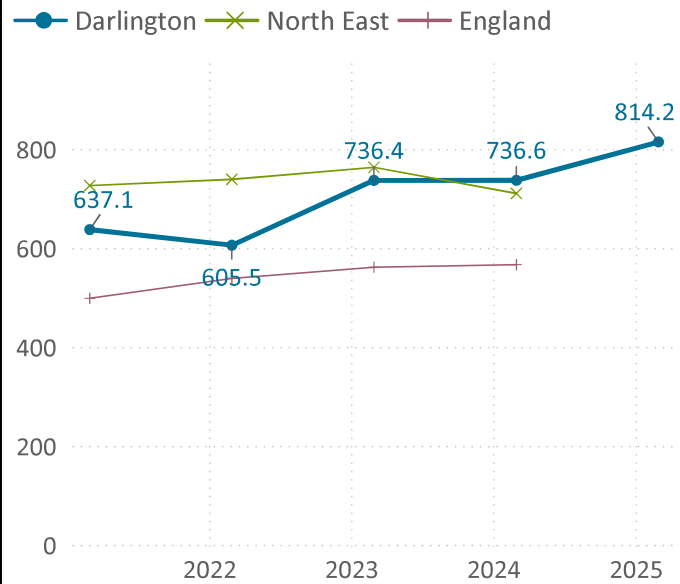
Lead Officer: Lisa Soderman: Head of Leisure

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Widen participation in recreation and leisure facilities including the Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex

## Older people admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care, per 100,000 of the 65+ population

The Council acknowledge that there is an increase in residential care by older people. Demand, complexity and need are the contributing factors for this increase. The Council is actively working to reduce reliance on residential care through our strength based practice approach and where possible ensuring a home first approach for people being discharged from hospital. The Council will continue to monitor this trend.



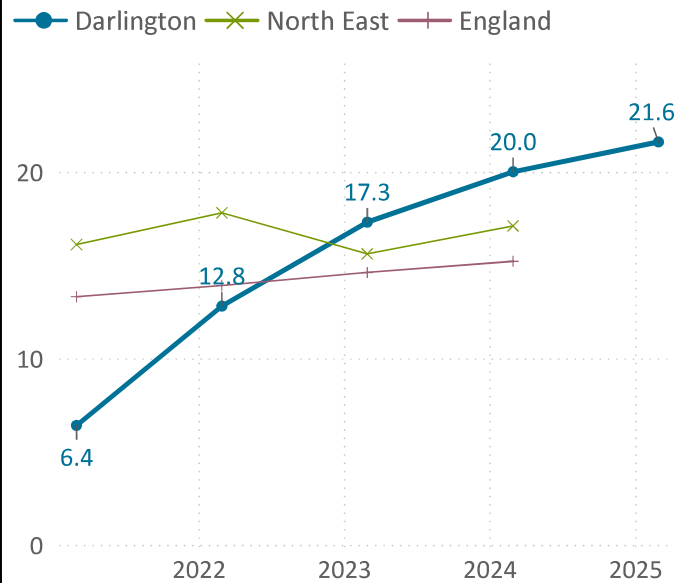
Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

## Adults aged 18 - 64 admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care homes, per 100,000 population

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



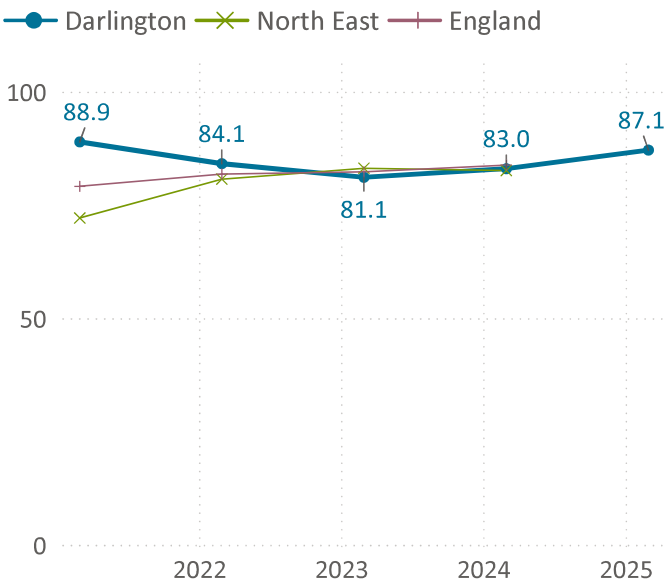
Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

## Proportion of older people who are still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement or rehabilitation services

This data indicated the service provides to support people to return home following discharge from hospital, through assessment, support planning and short term reablement offer. This graph illustrates that at the end of March 2025, the proportion of older people who are still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/rehabilitation services was 87.1%. Performance in this indicator is the highest it has been since March 2021. Performance in this indicator remains high despite an increase in the complexity of hospital discharges.



Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

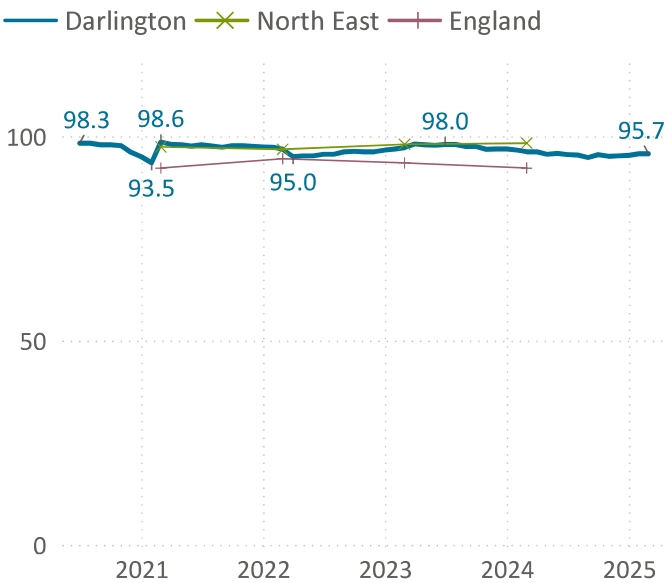
Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

## Percentage of people using social care who receive self-directed support

As at the end of March 2025, 95.7% of people using social care were receiving self directed support. This remains a relatively static level.

Darlington typically exceeds both the national and regional averages for this measure, reflecting our strong ethos of taking a strengths-based approach to support residents in need. The Council maximises service users’ choice and control over the services they receive, to ensure these best suit peoples’ particular needs and preferences. The Council continues to commission Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) to provide the direct payments support service which promotes people to manage their own personal support budgets.



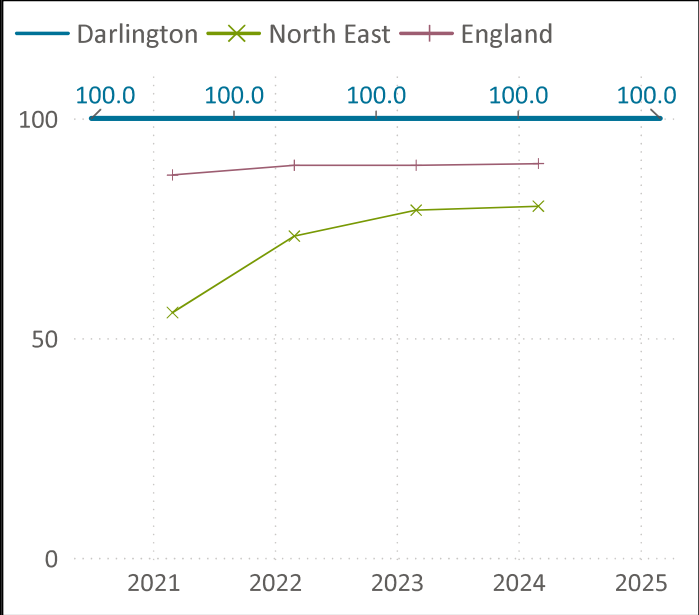
Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

Percentage of carers using social care who receive self-directed support

100% of carers using social care received self-directed support. This data, which shows Darlington exceeds both the national and regional average for this metric, reflects how all carers, who are in receipt of a commissioned service, now have a personal budget. This enables them to maximise their independence and choice, to support their wellbeing and ensure they can access the support that best suits their needs. The Council continues working with carers and carers support groups to listen to the needs of carers. The Council has established Carers Champions within the service, and report on the Carers Action quarterly to the Commitment to Carers Strategy group.



Lead Officer: Joss Harbron: Assistant Director - Adult Social Care

Council Plan Priority: Living well

Key Deliverable: Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

## Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations

**Provide a safe and supportive living environment for children cared for by the council by increasing the number of children placed in council foster care and, when appropriate, council-run residential homes.**

There are currently 57 approved Foster Carer Households, which is an increase from 52 Foster Carer households at the same period in 2024. 11 Foster Carers were approved at Panel during 2024/25 compared with 5 the previous year.

Our Childrens Homes continue to be at full capacity with 5 out of our 6 homes being graded as Good by Ofsted.

## **Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington**

In line with the Council Plan priorities on inclusion in schools the Education Strategy Group (ESG) has developed the Darlington Inclusion Charter which was launched at an all-schools event on 21st June 2024. The Inclusion Charter exemplifies key characteristics of inclusive practice that all schools in Darlington can sign up to. This was informed by shared challenges relating to attendance, suspensions and more complex Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

The ESG has entered a national Evidence Exploration Partnership to support this work. It is anticipated that the Inclusion Charter will provide a helpful starting point for the Evidence Exploration Partnership which will support the Local Authority and schools to develop evidence-informed practices and strategies to embed this commitment to inclusion. Darlington Educational Psychology Service has been trialling a model of training / briefing senior leaders, pastoral and curriculum leads in relation to the Charter and its principles at a trust-wide level. Small groups of influential staff within each school are then positioned to work closely with their teams to share and discuss the charter and use the reflection tools to delve deeper into school systems and practices in a way that feels appropriate for the individual school. The hope is that they can then continue to support the implementation of the Inclusion Charter over time. 57% of Darlington schools and colleges have taken part in these sessions to date.

Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

## **Work with the Department for Education and the successful academy trust sponsor to ensure the free school for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is developed on schedule, providing vital additional specialist capacity in Darlington**

Darlington was awarded a special free school following our successful bid as part of Wave 3 of the programme. A sponsor multi academy trust has been assigned to operate the school. We have been informed by the Department for Education that the Darlington school is now subject to value for money consideration, in line with the government's vision for the special educational needs system. We have been informed by the Department for Education that they are not yet able to update beyond that but will do so as soon as possible.

Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

**Develop more meaningful services by ensuring children and young people are involved in service development and commissioning activity**

A number of projects/groups undertake work which enable young people to be involved in service development and commissioning activity, for example Youth Parliament, Darlington Youth Partnership, Darlo Care Crew, the Care Leavers Forum Youth Healthwatch, Family Action and the YMCA.

Engagement work with children has been ongoing throughout 2024/25 particularly in the development of the new Young Carers service and the development of the Children and Young Peoples Plan.

Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

**Widen access of eligible children to the Holiday Activities and Food Programme which focusses on health, wellbeing and raising aspirations**

HAF (Holiday Activity and Food) programme provides free holiday club places to primary and secondary aged children on benefits-related free school meals, as well as other vulnerable children, giving them a chance to enjoy extracurricular activities and healthy meals during the school holidays. The Move More Team deliver activity weeks at numerous community venues with a wide geographical spread across the town, so children are given the greatest opportunity to participate in the programme in their relative local ward and community. In the Christmas holidays, over 1,600 places were booked for children aged 5-16 years of age, 908 free school meal children attended with 29% SEND children. Future funding will see further development to engage more eligible children into the programme.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people



**Work in partnership with the early years sector and health services to promote school readiness and the delivery of the expansion of funded childcare entitlement**

Evidence suggests that the childcare market in Darlington has been able to accommodate an increase in demand following the first two phases of childcare entitlement expansion. There is an overall sufficiency of places to meet the current demand from parents in Darlington. For summer and autumn 2024, Darlington’s take up has been above the national rate. However, the anticipated increase in demand for hours in September 2025 is likely to require a further shift in the market.

In early 2023, funding was made available by the Department for Education for local authorities to fund capital projects in schools and settings to deliver expansion of entitlement and/or wraparound places. 6 projects are being funded in Darlington schools and settings. These projects will deliver up to an additional 65 wraparound places, 36 entitlements places for 2-year-olds and 60 entitlement places for mixed ages. Towards the end of 2024 DfE invited eligible state-funded primary-phase schools to apply for the School-Based Nursery Capital Grant. 4 Darlington schools applied for capital funding and all 4 were successful in securing the funding to enable them to open or expand their nursery in September 2025.

A working group has been established to identify key actions to further improve levels of school readiness amongst children in Darlington, and also specifically for children with free school meal status or special educational needs and disability (SEND).

Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

**Refresh and deliver the Children and Young People’s Plan working with services across the council, key stakeholders, and children and young people in Darlington**

The Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP) is the key delivery plan for children within the Council Plan. It identifies what key actions will be taken to deliver the agreed priority for children – the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations. It is a partnership plan which shows how organisations and agencies in Darlington will work together to improve outcomes for children. The plan for 2024 – 2027 takes the form of a video and poster which have been designed and produced by local children. Extensive data analysis and engagement activity with children, young people and key stakeholders identified five priorities which will form the basis of the plan: Health; Education; Family and Carers; Employment, and Community. The CYPP was launched in November 2024 with regular updates on progress being posted on the Council website.

Lead Officer: Christine Shields: Assistant Director - Commissioning, Performance & Transformation

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Continue the successful management of the Safety Valve plan for the education budget to improve outcomes for young people with SEND, eliminate the historic deficit on funding and deliver a financially sustainable system

The Department for Education (DfE), as part of its wider Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, initiated the 'Safety Valve' intervention programme. The DfE recognises that over recent years, pressures on high needs budgets have contributed to many local authorities accruing deficits on their Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Darlington, in common with many areas, built up a deficit on the high needs block element of the DSG. If a local authority can demonstrate sufficiently that their DSG management plan creates lasting sustainability, including reaching an in-year balance as quickly as possible, then the department will enter into an agreement with the authority (subject to Ministerial approval). Darlington entered into an agreement in March 2023.

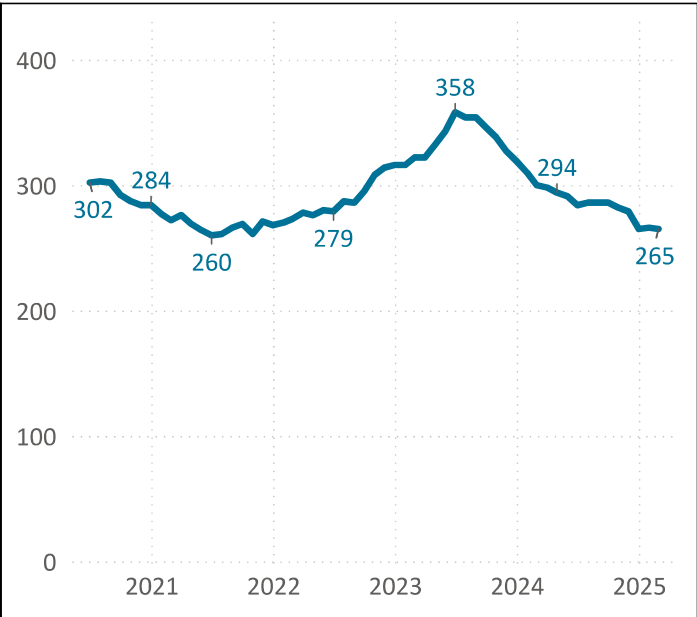
The plan has been progressing well with Darlington achieving an in year balance on the high needs block in 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. The combined deficit reduction work along with the contributions through the Safety Valve Agreement has reduced the deficit to circa £1.6 million and the council is currently on track to have eliminated the deficit within the terms of the agreement which is due to end in 2026/27. This will enable the council and partners to proceed with driving improvements in a financially sustainable way.

Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion  
Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Total number of looked after children (LAC)

265 children are being supported in the Council's care at the end of March 2025, 8.3% of which have come into the Council's care after being accepted by the Home Office as UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child).

This equates to a 14% reduction in the number of children (excluding those needing care as UASC) that were in the Council's care when compared to the end of March last year.

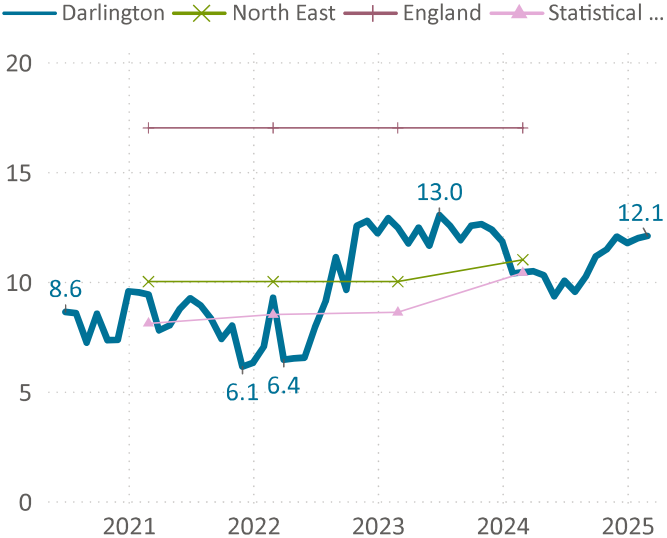


Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services  
Council Plan Priority: Children and young people  
Key Deliverable: Provide a safe and supportive living environment for children cared for by the council by increasing the number of children placed in council foster care and, when appropriate, council-run residential homes.

## Percentage of total looked after children (LAC) placed more than 20 miles away from home, inside or outside the boundary, as at the end of each reporting period (excludes children placed for adoption or where home address is "of no fixed abode")

12.1% of our Children in Care have been placed 20 or more miles away from their primary home as of March 2025. This is positively below the national average of 17%.

Every placement is scrutinised and reviewed ensuring that it is the most appropriate for the child enabling them to have the best support either with family links or specialised care.



Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

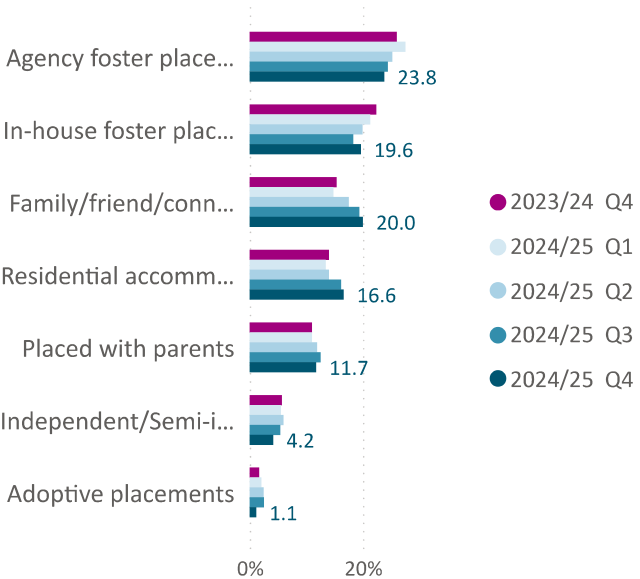
Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Provide a safe and supportive living environment for children cared for by the council by increasing the number of children placed in council foster care and, when appropriate, council-run residential homes.

## Percentage of looked after children by placement type

A large proportion of Darlington children in care were in a foster placement (43%) at the end of March 2025. 20% of children were placed in kinship care with relatives (including temporarily approved), 12% were placed with a parent, 21% were living in forms of supported residential accommodation, 1% were placed for adoption, the remaining 3% were in placements classified as other.

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



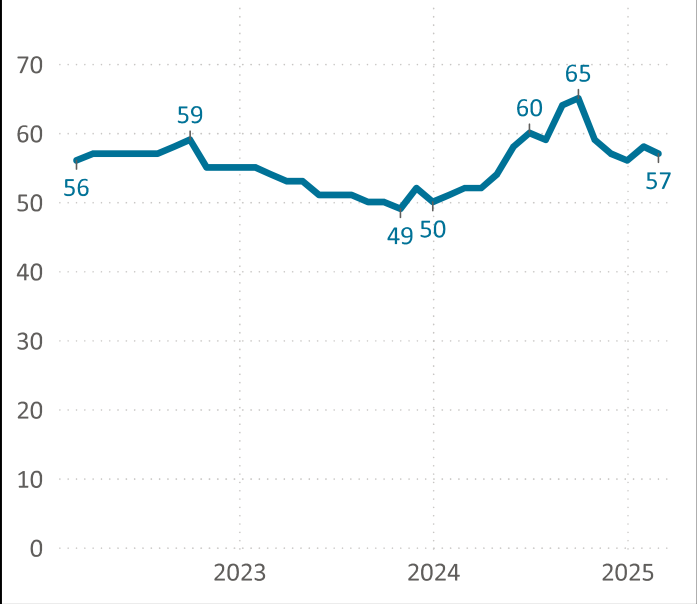
Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Provide a safe and supportive living environment for children cared for by the council by increasing the number of children placed in council foster care and, when appropriate, council-run residential homes.

Total number of approved foster carers

Currently the Council has 57 approved foster care families with 53 kinship connected carers approved. At the end of March 2025, the Council had 8 families with an open application / going through the mainstream assessments looking to become an approved foster carer to support Darlington’s children in care. Work continues to raise the foster caring profile in Darlington via the Council website and social media and during 2024/25 the Council received a further 26 new fostering enquiry applications and approved 11 new foster care families.



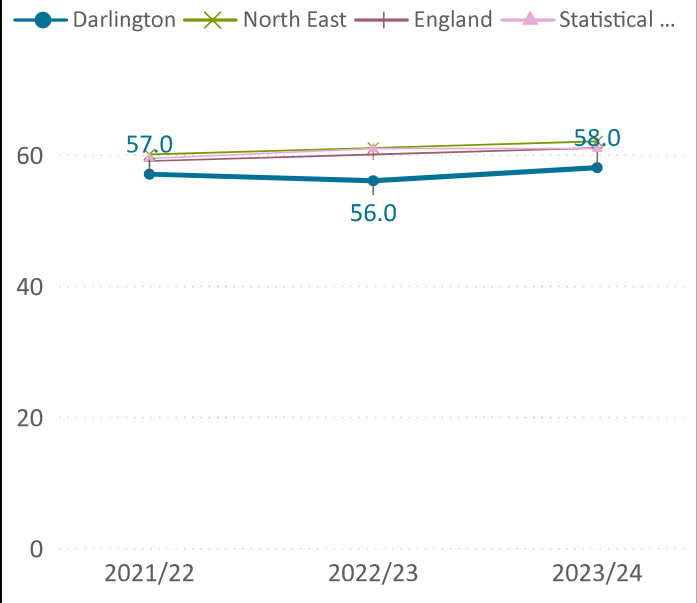
Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Provide a safe and supportive living environment for children cared for by the council by increasing the number of children placed in council foster care and, when appropriate, council-run residential homes.

Pupils reaching expected standard in Key Stage 2 for Reading, Writing & Maths (Percentage of all pupils)

The percentage of Darlington pupils achieving the expected standard in Key Stage 2 for Reading, Writing & Maths (RWM) has increased slightly between academic year 2022/23 and 2023/24 after a small decrease the previous year. Darlington still remains below the national, regional and statistical neighbour comparators, which have risen slightly year-on-year, but the gap is slightly narrower than last year.



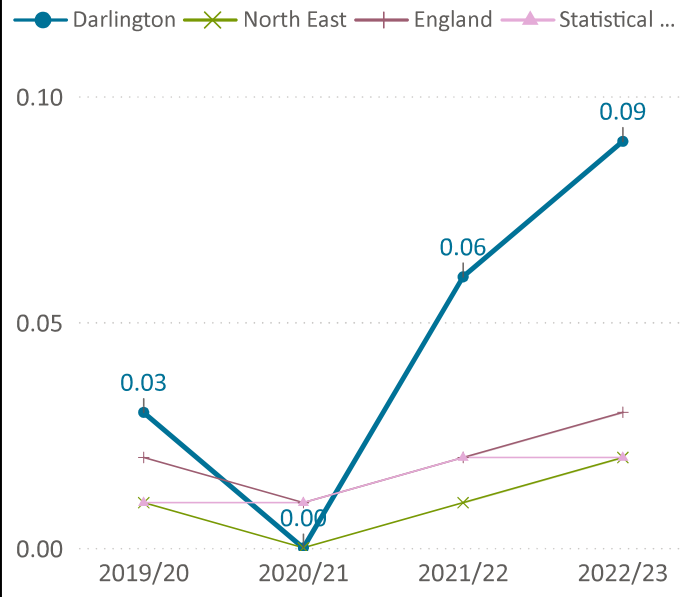
Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington

Permanent exclusions in Primary schools (Percentage of total pupils)

Permanent exclusion rate for Darlington's primary school children has increased greatly again this year from 0.06 in academic year 2021/22 to 0.09 in academic year 2022/23, rising much higher than the national, regional and statistical neighbour comparators which have been rising slightly but not to the same extent. Note that this is due to a small number of primary schools excluding a large number of pupils rather than an authority-wide trend.



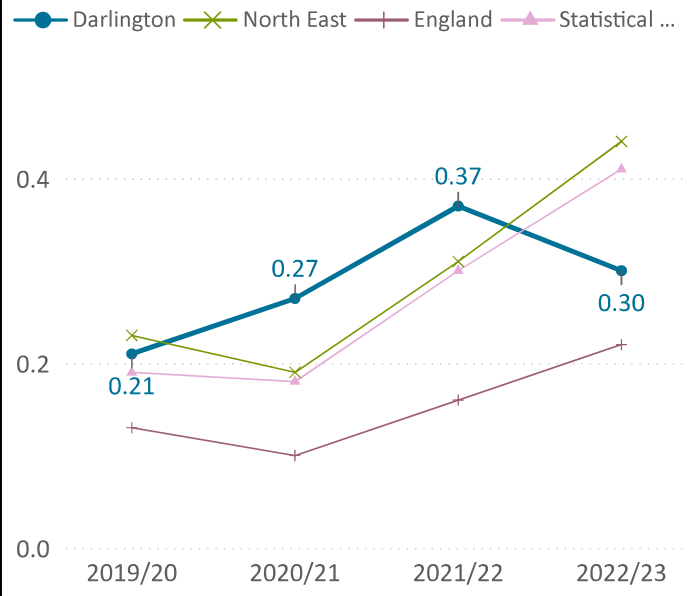
Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington

Permanent exclusions in Secondary schools (Percentage of total pupils)

The permanent exclusion rate of Darlington's secondary school pupils has decreased somewhat between academic year 2021/22 and 2022/23, falling below the regional and statistical neighbour comparators but still remaining above the national average. Note that this high value is due to a small number of secondary schools excluding a large number of pupils rather than an authority-wide trend, which is a trend seen across the region.



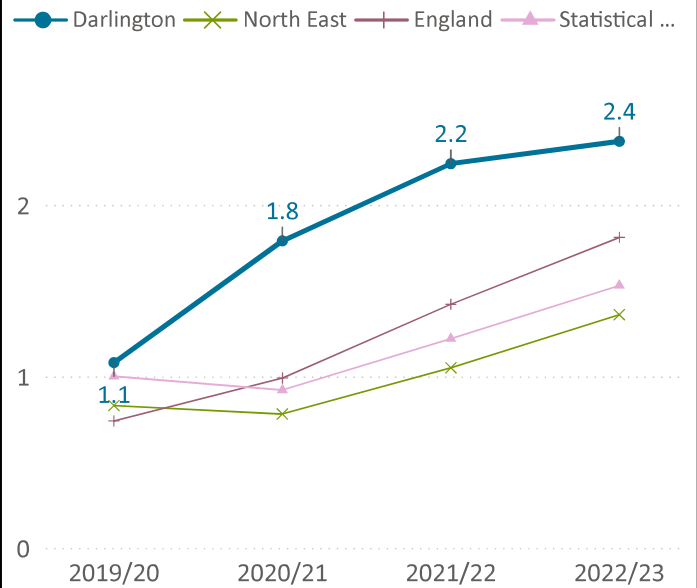
Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington

Suspensions in Primary schools (Percentage of total pupils)

The suspension rate of Darlington's primary school pupils has increased slightly on last year, although the relative increase is lower than previous years and appears to be slowing. It still remains well above the national, regional and statistical neighbour comparators. Note that this high value is due to a small number of primary schools excluding a large number of pupils rather than an authority-wide trend.



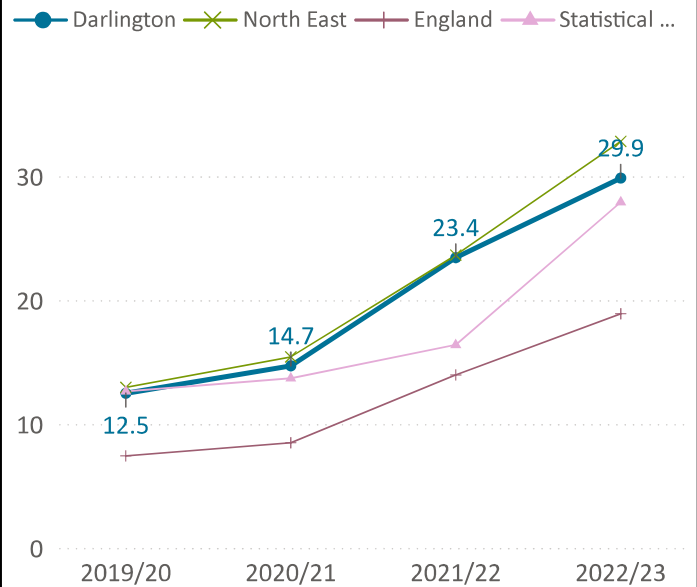
Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington

Suspensions in Secondary schools (Percentage of total pupils)

The suspension rate of Darlington's secondary school pupils has increased again between academic year 2021/22 and 2022/23, sitting above the national and statistical neighbour comparators but below the regional comparator. Note that this high value is due to a small number of secondary schools excluding a large number of pupils rather than an authority-wide trend. This trend is reflected across the region.



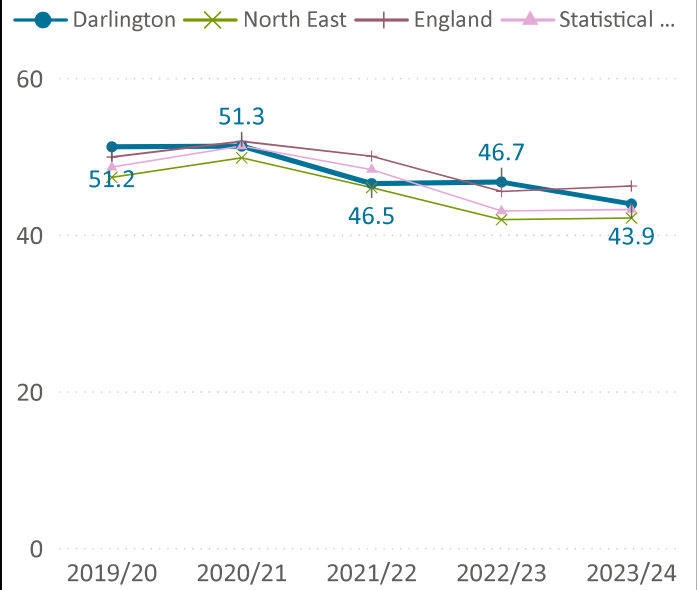
Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington

Pupils achieving 9-5 pass in English and Maths (Percentage of pupils)

The percentage of Darlington's KS4 pupils achieving a grade 9-5 pass in English and Maths has decreased slightly between academic year 2022/23 and 2023/24 after a small increase last year. This decrease is reflected in the overall trend of the national, regional and statistical neighbour comparators over the last 5 years although they all saw a very small increase in this past year.



Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

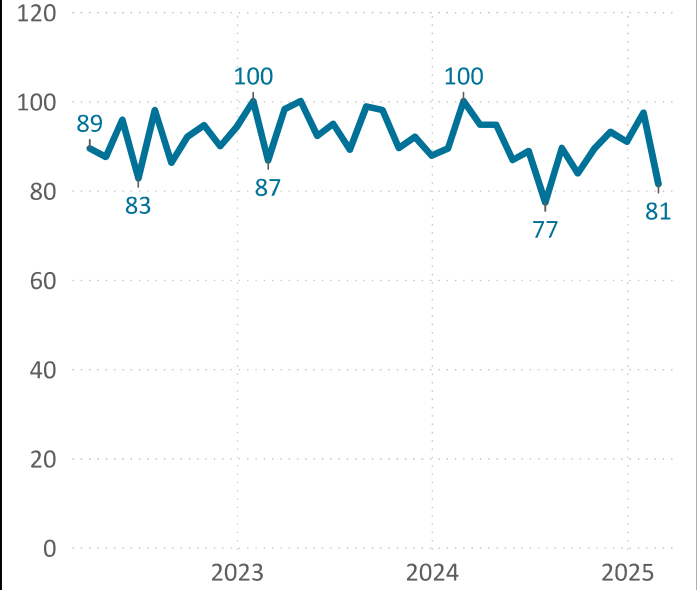
Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington

Percentage of looked after children (LAC) within the month who participated in their review (excludes children under the age of 4yrs)

During the 2024/25 period, cumulatively 89.3% of reviews for children in care, specifically those over the age of four, participated either by attending the review or by submitting their opinions for inclusion.

Over the past 12 months, we have seen a minor decrease in participation compared to the cumulative participation in previous years, which may be attributed to the transition back to in-person meetings, as opposed to the virtual formats utilised during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

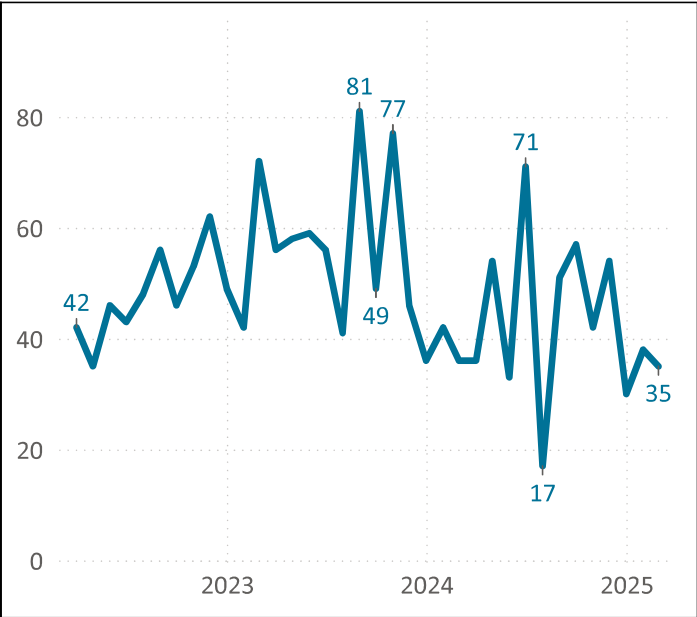
Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Develop more meaningful services by ensuring children and young people are involved in service development and commissioning activity

## Number of looked after children (LAC) within the month who participated in their review (excludes children under the age of 4yrs)

During the 2024/25 period, a total of 692 looked after reviews were conducted, with 580 specifically for children and young people aged over four years. The number of reviews can vary from month to month based on their scheduled due dates.

It is important for all children to participate in their reviews to ensure they are actively involved in the decision-making process.



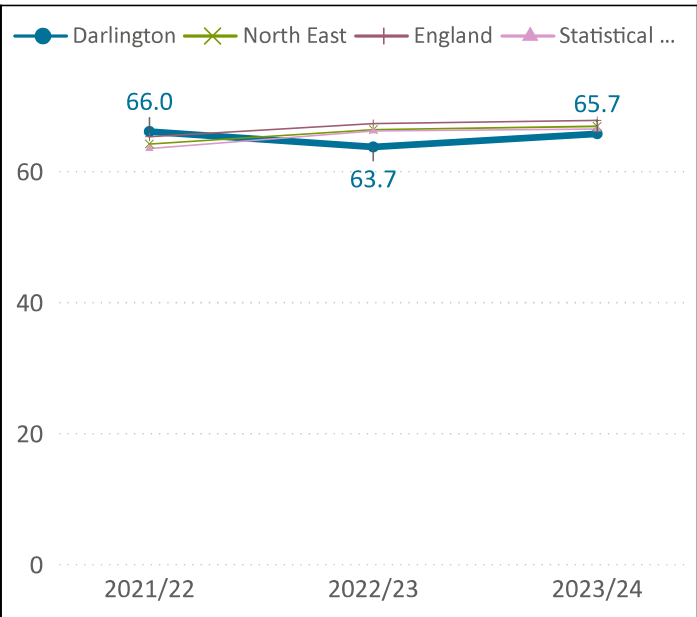
Lead Officer: Chris Bell: Assistant Director - Children's Services

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Develop more meaningful services by ensuring children and young people are involved in service development and commissioning activity

## School Readiness: all children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception (Percentage of all eligible children)

After a large decrease between academic year 2021/22 and 2022/23, the percentage of Darlington children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception has increased slightly to fall roughly in line with the national, regional and statistical neighbour comparators in academic year 2023/24, however it still sits below its 2021/22 value of 66% which was higher than all comparators.



Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

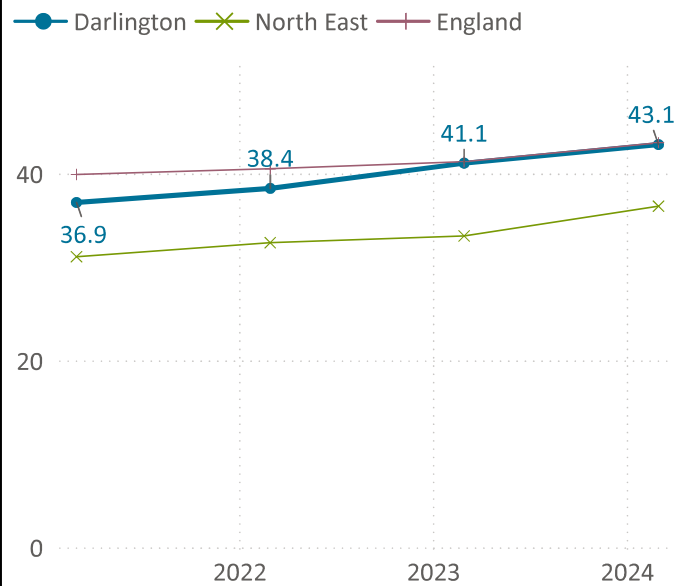
Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Work in partnership with the early years sector and health services to promote school readiness and the delivery of the expansion of funded childcare entitlement



Pupils with an EHCP educated in mainstream schools (Percentage of pupils with an EHCP)

With the support of mainstream schools and continued partnership working Darlington's percentage of pupils with Education Health and Care Plans educated in mainstream settings has risen from 34.2% in 2020 to 43.1% in 2024, higher than the North East average of 36.5% The Darlington performance is now in line with the England average of 43.3%. There has been a year on year increase in pupils supported in mainstream settings since 2020.



Lead Officer: Tony Murphy: Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

Council Plan Priority: Children and young people

Key Deliverable: Continue the successful management of the Safety Valve plan for the education budget to improve outcomes for young people with SEND, eliminate the historic deficit on funding and deliver a financially sustainable system

## Council Plan Priority: Communities

Working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities

### Support communities to remain safe and resilient by working with key agencies and communities to address anti-social behaviour and crime issues in the community

Over the last 12 months, officers have continued to tackle problems associated with, anti-social behaviour (ASB), fly-tipping and waste in back lanes. The below figures provide an overview of activity:

- (a) 467 Cases reported (of which 439 closed)
- (b) 3 x Duty of Care Fixed Penalty Tickets (£1,800)
- (c) 1 x Duty of Care Fail to pay Fixed Penalty Ticket (Fined £458.00)
- (d) 10 x Section 110 Prosecutions (Total Fines, £4,122)
- (e) Prosecutions for Fly Tipping and Waste Management Offences x 2 (Total Fines, £2,754)

Number Forty supports anybody who needs assistance during an evening in Darlington. Volunteers do a great job in providing support.

To address ASB, the Shopwatch scheme continues to grow, with the Yarm Road and North Road retail parks starting schemes shortly. The Council continues to contribute to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's 'Safer Businesses Group'.

The begging figures for this reporting year compared to the previous year show a reduction in reported begging of 11.5%. There is currently a cohort of 20 people begging, who partners are engaging with, offering all available support mechanisms. An intelligence document is maintained of the top 6 individuals and reviewed during bi-monthly multi-agency meetings. Various support is offered through a dedicated outreach worker who engages and signposts individuals to the service best suited to their needs.

Lead Officer: Chris Knox: Head of Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Communities

## **Work with partners to reduce the burden of the cost of living, with a focus on food and fuel insecurity**

In addition to the Household Support Fund, the Council has been in discussion with the network of Food Banks that operate across Darlington. A meeting was called which was attended by 8 of the 10 foodbanks that are known of in Darlington. It provided an opportunity for them to talk with one another which revealed that there would be great benefit in them collaborating. The Council has agreed to collate a survey of them which will form the basis of a discussion at a further meeting.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Council Plan Priority: Communities

## **Support and strengthen partnership working with voluntary and community groups with a focus on addressing the causes of inequality, financial inclusion, social exclusion, and vulnerable families with children and young people**

Largely as a result of the strong relationships with the voluntary sector that have emerged through the work of the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group (VCSE), the Household Support Fund programme is being delivered through the sector as third party providers.

The group has established three working groups looking at social exclusion, financial exclusion and children and families.

Last year, the group selected four of its members to join the Long Term Plan for Towns Board which has subsequently become the Neighbourhood Board. The group has now been invited to be the primary link for the voluntary and community sector. It is anticipated that it will play a significant role in delivering community engagement and capacity build for the Plan for Neighbourhoods.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Council Plan Priority: Communities

## **Support a strong Community Safety Partnership to ensure the issues affecting the safety and security of our communities are addressed collectively, including addressing hate crime**

The Community Safety Partnership thematic group 'Building Stronger and Cohesive Communities' meets regularly to support our hard to reach communities and address community concerns. In support of this process Darlington has a strong Unity Group which meets on a regular basis and has members in the group from all sections of our community.

North Road and Northgate Community Cohesion Panel has been set-up focusing upon geographical areas and behaviours in the area. Uptake by partners and in particular, residents, is encouraging with initial grant funding to support locally driven community based initiatives, which will address issues negatively affecting those communities. Problem Solving techniques and co-ordinated partner approaches to those initiatives will be evaluated with lessons learned and best practice helping future work Borough wide. Recent projects funded through this group are: improved lighting on areas of concern in North Road, the installation of 6 defibrillators and bleed kits along the North Road Corridor and funding of two youth provision initiatives in the North Road area.

Darlington Town Centre has also seen the installation of a 5 further defibrillators and bleed kits which are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, along with 50 trauma kits deployed across the town centre.

Lead Officer: Chris Knox: Head of Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Communities

## **Ensuring business activity is regulated, licensed and enforced effectively to protect the health and wellbeing of residents, visitors and businesses.**

Environmental Health officers have carried out visits to check products being sold are safe for consumption. Many sweets and fizzy drinks imported from the US contain chemicals which are banned in the UK or additives which may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children. The team have been liaising with local businesses about the risks posed by imported confectionary and asking them to withdraw stock that is not compliant with UK regulations. The warning comes following a series of inspections carried out by Environmental Health, where nearly £1,600 of confectionary containing dangerous ingredients was seized from eight local shops. Media reports and TV interviews have helped to promote the campaign.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Communities

## Work with the voluntary and community sector to develop a strategy for informal volunteering which empowers people to volunteer and directs volunteering to areas of greatest need, including working with Darlington Cares to deliver an enhanced volunteering programme

A draft strategy framework has been produced for internal consultation in advance of a discussion at the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group. It proposes a focus on:

- structured volunteering
- employer supported volunteering
- community volunteering.

After describing the positive messages to be promoted to encourage volunteering, it then outlines a series of actions that the Council could take to positively support the growth of each type of volunteering.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

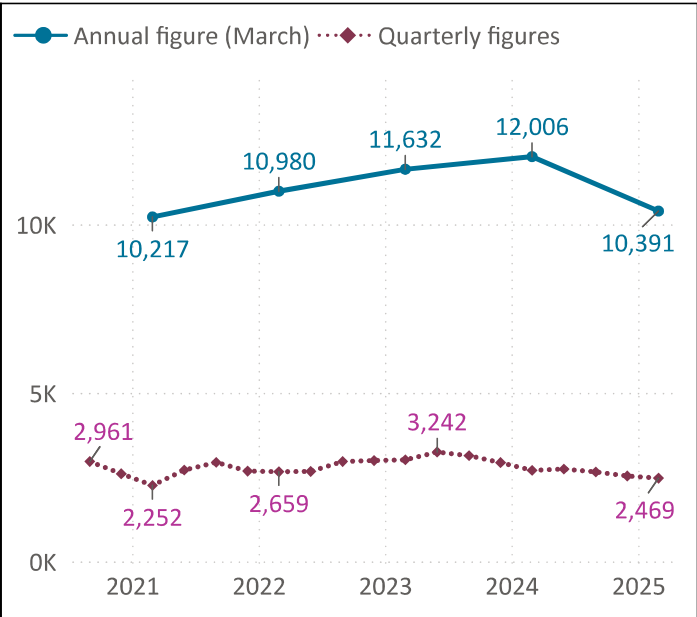
Council Plan Priority: Communities

## Number of crimes (total)

The number of crimes reported in 2023-24 was 12,006. The figure for the end of 2024-25 was 10,391 reported crimes, showing a decrease of 13.4%. This equates to 1,614 less victims of crime across Darlington.

The town centre shows a reduction in crime, 1,493 victims of crime in 2023-24 and 1,357 victims in 2024-25, a decrease of 9.1%. This equates to 136 less victims of crime in Darlington town centre.

A number of initiatives have been delivered between Community Safety, the Police and partners to target criminality. Shopwatch was relaunched to support business and assist the police in their operations against shoplifting. Shoplifting offences in the town centre have reduced by 21.8%.



Lead Officer: Chris Knox: Head of Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Communities

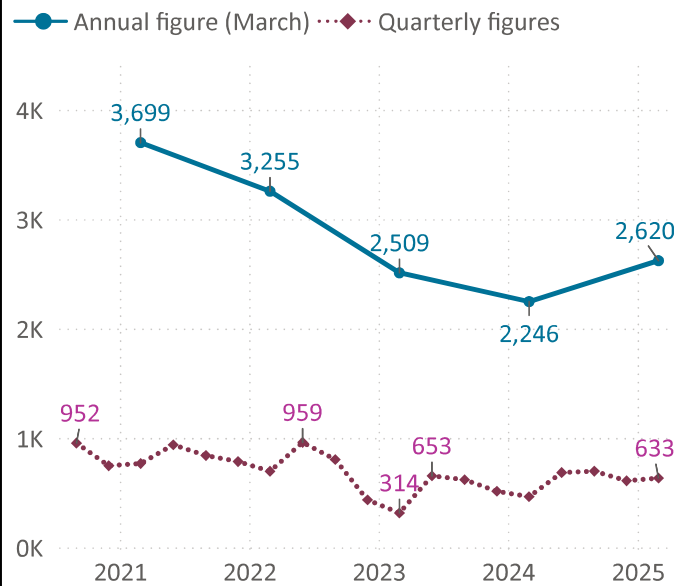
Key Deliverable: Support communities to remain safe and resilient by working with key agencies and communities to address anti-social behaviour and crime issues in the community

Number of ASB incidents, excluding duplicates (total)

Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) has been on a downward trajectory. However, 2024-25 has seen an increase in ASB in Darlington of 16.7%, equating to 374 more reports compared to the previous year.

The increase has been seen across all areas of Darlington with the town centre having an increase of 61.7%, which equates to 116 more reports compared to the previous year.

Targeted action has been taken by the Council, Police and partners to address the increase with extra resources being deployed by the Police, Council and partners. The latest monitoring shows this is starting to have an impact and this will be monitored with ongoing evidence-led action.



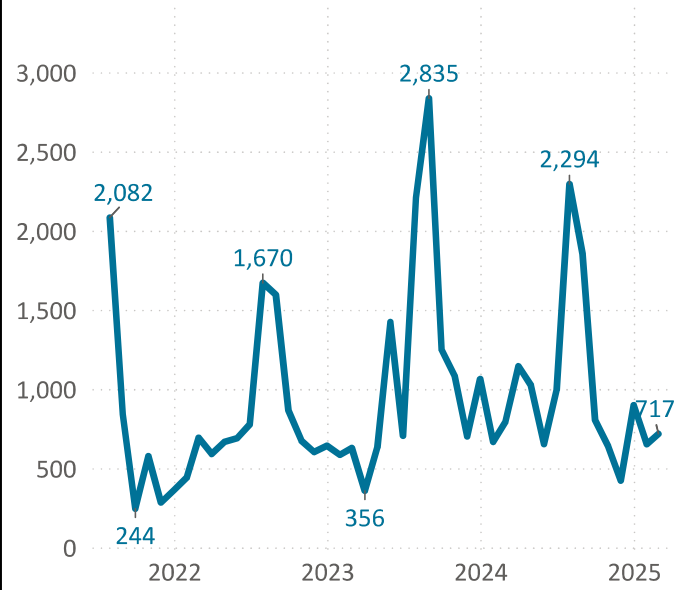
Lead Officer: Chris Knox: Head of Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Communities

Key Deliverable: Support communities to remain safe and resilient by working with key agencies and communities to address anti-social behaviour and crime issues in the community

Number of items of school uniform distributed

The Uniform Shop continues to be a valued resource for parents in Darlington. Levels of donation remain high as does the number of people accessing the service. The project is a collaboration between the Council and Darlington Cares. Along with the help it provides parents in coping with the cost of uniforms it also has a positive environmental impact in reducing the volume of uniform being discarded.



Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

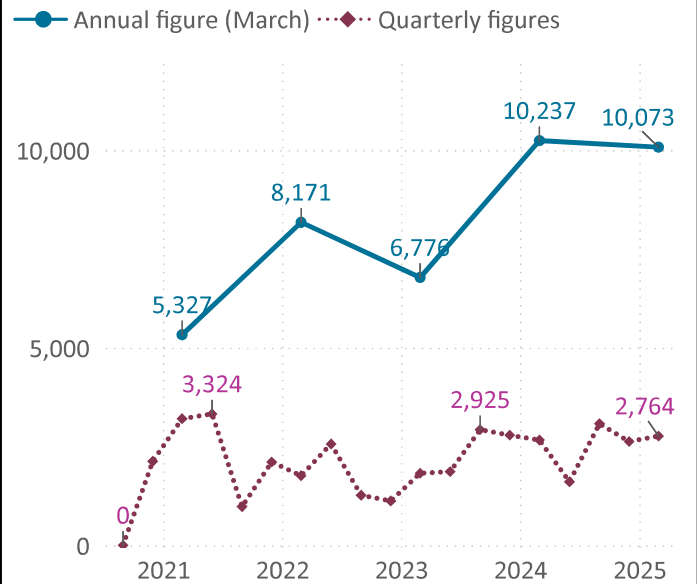
Council Plan Priority: Communities

Key Deliverable: Work with partners to reduce the burden of the cost of living, with a focus on food and fuel insecurity

Number of Darlington Cares volunteer hours

Darlington Cares volunteering continues to grow as does its membership. The programme of activities delivered under the three areas of focus; environment, education and social justice, attract growing numbers of company volunteers.

The Darlington Cares Board at its last meeting considered how it could increase its impact and contribution of its members to Darlington with a particular interest in the ambitions of young people. Proposals are to be considered at its next meeting.



Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Council Plan Priority: Communities

Key Deliverable: Work with the voluntary and community sector to develop a strategy for informal volunteering which empowers people to volunteer and directs volunteering to areas of greatest need, including working with Darlington Cares to deliver an enhanced volunteering programme

## Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

A well-connected, clean and sustainable borough

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

Work is progressing on the delivery of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) programme across the Tees Valley. In Darlington this means investment in the Darlington station project, development of walking and cycling schemes and improvements to key bus corridors. The walking and cycling and bus corridor schemes are currently at the end of feasibility stage and are moving into detailed design in early 2025. Construction works will commence later in 2025 subject to business cases demonstrating value for money. We are also working closely with the Tees Valley Combined Authority to develop projects for the second round of CRSTS funding.

Lead Officer: Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Projects

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment



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

The Town Centre Partnership team collaborates closely with high street businesses to develop a dynamic events programme aimed at stimulating foot traffic and enhancing dwell time in Darlington. These annual events are strategically designed to draw visitors to the town centre, encouraging them to explore, enjoy, and return. The programme features a diverse range of events, from niche experiences such as the Misfits Market, hosted by a local independent retailer, to family-friendly animation days like Dinosaur Day, and large-scale music events like the Rhythm and Tunes Weekend, as well as smaller trails.

As a Purple Flag-awarded town, Darlington is recognised for its safe and vibrant evening economy, further enhancing the town's appeal. Additionally, Darlington's commitment to excellence was showcased when the town won Gold at the Northumbria in Bloom 2024 awards, earning the prestigious opportunity to represent the region at the 2025 Britain in Bloom competition.

This variety of events ensures broad regional appeal, offering free, inclusive activities that attract a diverse audience. The events team continuously engages with the community to refine and evolve the programme, ensuring that both visitors and town centre businesses benefit from the increased activity and engagement.

Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

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

Cabinet approved the introduction of weekly food waste collections from April 2026 in line with national changes as part of the Government's wider Simpler Recycling reforms. All English local authorities will be collecting food waste from April 2026 onwards (unless they already do so). Cabinet also approved the move to weekly collections of recycling materials when the food waste collections launch. This should increase the amount of waste that is recycled and provide enhanced opportunities for residents to recycle as much of their waste as possible.

Plans are being developed for the introduction of these changes coupled with the procurement of containers, vehicles and disposal arrangements required to treat food waste. The Council are utilising resources and expertise provided by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to inform the development of a communications programme to inform residents of the changes and maximise opportunities to recycle. Further updates will be provided in the coming months.

Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

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

Hopetown Darlington opened on 16 July 2024 and has been well received by visitors, achieving a number of awards in recognition of the excellent facilities and the offer available at Hopetown. Throughout the year, planning continued on developing an exciting, varied and spectacular festival for the Bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR). The S&DR200 festival was launched at Kynren, Bishop Auckland, with a spectacular show, 'All Change', enjoyed by an audience of more than 6,500. 'Railway Pioneers - celebrating the railway rockstars of the past', a display of early locomotives, launched at Hopetown on 4 April 2025 and will be on show until 22 June 2025. The festival programme runs through to October 2025, across County Durham, Darlington and Stockton. The events to enjoy in Darlington during this period are as follows:

Steam to the Future (11 July to 5 October) - an immersive, steam inspired installation at Hopetown.

Ghost Train (20 September) - a one day festival featuring performers, live music and a procession of large-scale art installations from the Town Centre to Hopetown.

Anniversary Journey (26-28 September) - a working replica of Locomotion No 1 will come across the historic Skerne Bridge on Saturday 27 September, 200 years to the day of the world's first steam powered passenger rail journey.

Lead Officer: Ian Thompson: Assistant Director - Community Services

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

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

Two studies are being progressed in partnership with key agencies that will inform and assist future planning, investment and bidding opportunities. The two studies that are taking place are:

\* The Darlington Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership (NIDP) study. The initial study is complete and a priority scheme has been identified which covers the West Beck and Cocker Beck watercourses, including Cockerton area. The current outline programme is for the stage 1/2 report to be complete by the end of 2025, development of the business case for Government Grant in Aid (GiA) funding to take place in 2026-27, with construction from 2028 onwards (subject to successful business case and support from Northumbrian Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (NRFCC)).

\* Flood Asset Risk Study. This is looking at the risks and impact associated with the possible failure of blockage of key assets such as bridges and culverts to determine investment and maintenance strategies to minimise the risk of flooding. A high level study identified a number of locations where further investigation was warranted due to the impact that a blockage or partial blockage of the channel or culvert would cause to properties. The main scheme identified was on West Beck, which was incorporated into the NIDP scheme. Another scheme has been identified at Killerby and costed options have been drawn up. The Council is continuing to assess the business case for this scheme.

A number of smaller schemes are being developed to address local issues.

Lead Officer: Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Projects

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

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

The Council recently approved a revised Local Development Scheme, which in effect is a timetable for the production of planning policy documents. One of the documents within the timetable is a Supplementary Planning Document on design. This will replace the existing document which was adopted in 2011. The intention is to consult on this document before the end of the year and to hopefully adopt a final version early in the new year. The document when adopted will be a material consideration in determining planning applications.

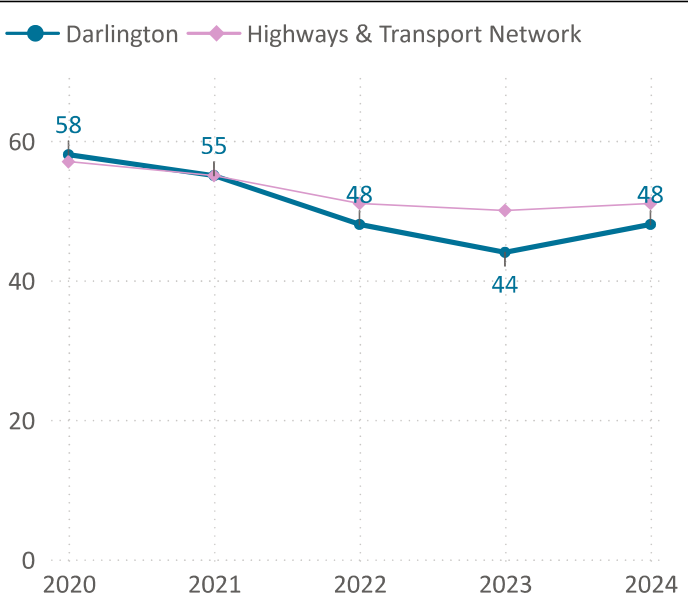
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

**Overall Public Satisfaction with Public Transport Theme (National Highways and Transport Survey)**

The satisfaction survey results are taken from a survey conducted by the National Highways and Transport Network, an organisation which provides a range of benchmarking services to Local Authorities. The overall public satisfaction with public transport has increased from 44% in 2023 to 48% in 2024. This is below the Highways and Transport Network average of all the authorities taking part of 51%.

Tees Valley Combined Authority is the Local Transport Authority responsible for public transport and the Council will continue to work in partnership to steer investment into public transport in Darlington to improve satisfaction levels utilising Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding.



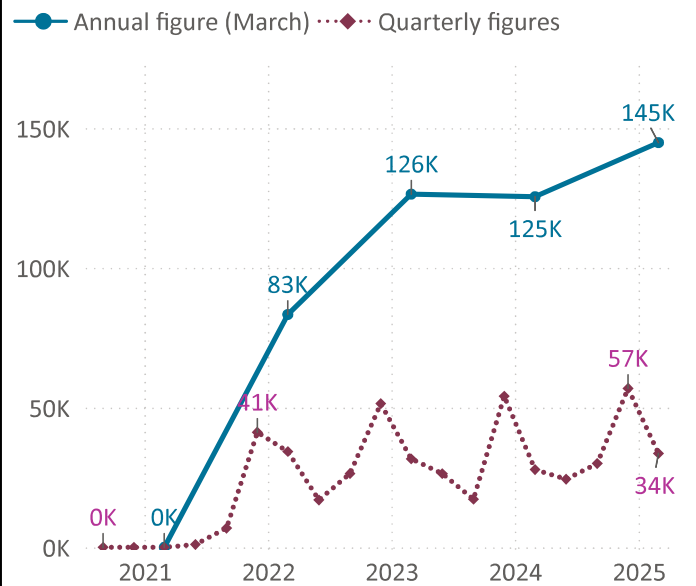
Lead Officer: Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Projects

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

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

Number of individual attendances at theatre shows

Audience attendances at Darlington Hippodrome shows for Q4 2024/25 were 33,571 compared to 27,803 for the same quarter last year. 18,357 people attended performances in March alone including sold out performances for Jasper Carrott and Alistair McGowan and Franki Valli and The Four Seasons starring Peter Andre. The Hippodrome has achieved an annual attendance of 144,780, up 19,351 in attendances compared to last year.



Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

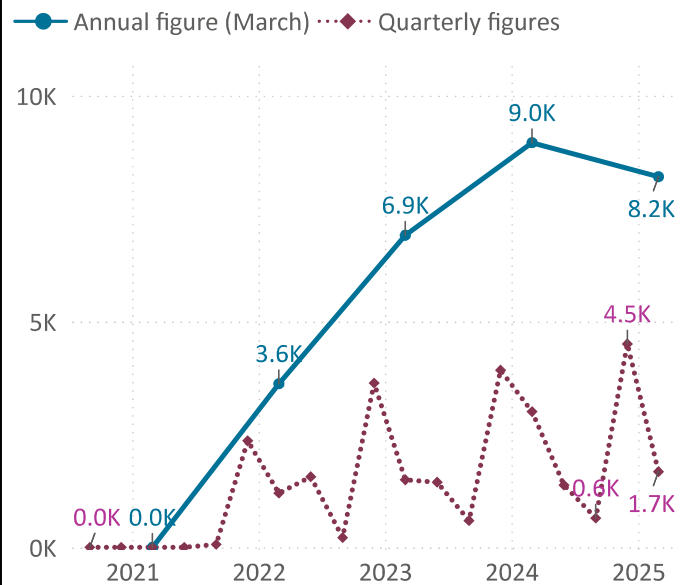
Key Deliverable: Work with local stakeholders and businesses to promote a diverse and accessible programme of events that maximises footfall in the town centre and has a positive impact on the local economy

Number of individual attendances at Hullabaloo shows

1,676 people have attended performances at The Hullabaloo in Q4 compared to 3,004 across the same period last year.

8,203 people have attended shows at The Hullabaloo this year, which is 754 less than the previous year despite an increase in the number of performances.

A review of programming has taken place for the next financial year to address the downturn, which will focus more on comedy, which attracted higher attendances.



Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

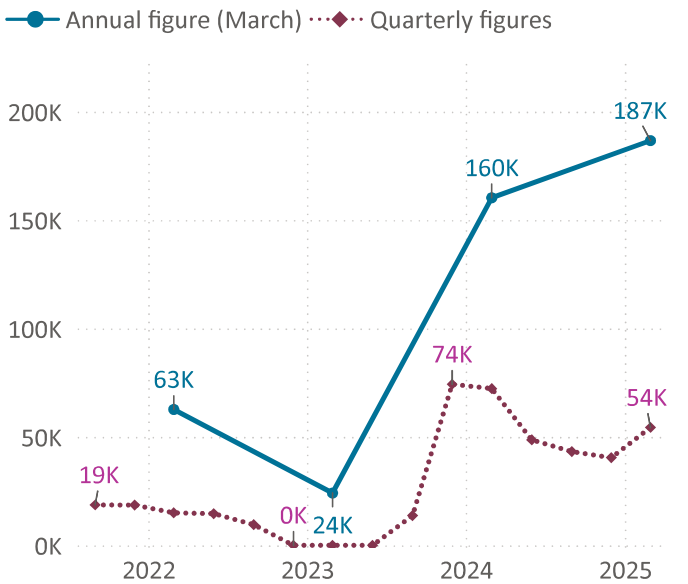
Key Deliverable: Work with local stakeholders and businesses to promote a diverse and accessible programme of events that maximises footfall in the town centre and has a positive impact on the local economy

Number of physical visits to Darlington Library (door count)

Our visitor count is managed from door counters positioned on the entrance ways on Crown Street, Priestgate and East Street. Visitor numbers have increased by 16% from the previous year.

More school classes are visiting the library for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) visits to The Hive or to borrow books. The Study is well used for work, researching and computer use. This year the Centre for Local Studies has also appeared busier, with solitary working and researching, but also groups visiting for information and support from staff.

The lending library appears quieter which corresponds with less adult stock being borrowed. However, the children's library is well used.



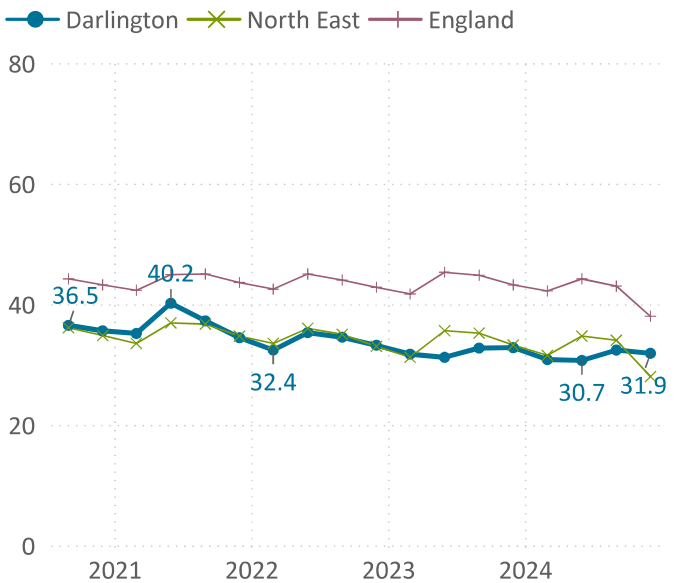
Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

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

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

The amount of waste that is recycled, composted or reused has fallen in recent years. However, the Council's performance to the end of December (31.9%) is slightly above the North East average (28.0%), but below the England average (38.0%). Work continues to be undertaken by Street Scene and communication teams to try to increase recycling and reduce contamination. Cabinet approved a report in January 2025 to introduce a weekly food waste collection service (as part of the Government's Simpler Recycling Reforms) and as part of this change to service, recycling collections will also move from fortnightly to weekly from April 2026. This should help to increase overall recycling rates.



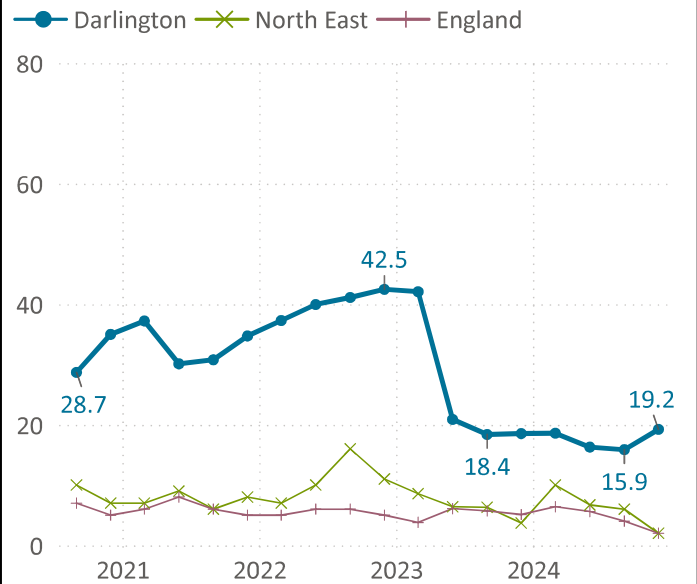
Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

Key Deliverable: Introduce food waste collections and support residents to increase overall recycling rates to move towards the national average

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

Data is only available up to December 2024 due to the lag in data verification through the national system. The percentage of household waste sent to landfill stands at 19.2%. Over time, more waste has been sent to energy recovery, which is higher up the waste hierarchy, causing less environmental impact than landfill. The Council is above the North East average for landfill, as the majority of other North East Council's have primary contracts with energy recovery facilities.



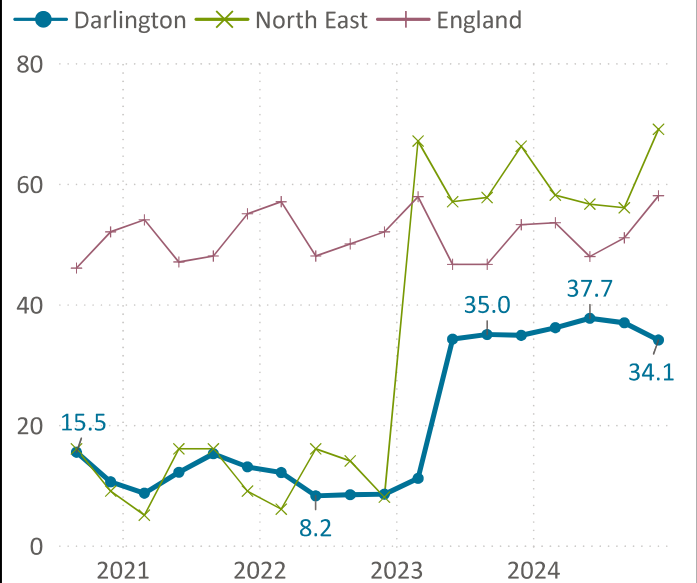
Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

Key Deliverable: Introduce food waste collections and support residents to increase overall recycling rates to move towards the national average

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

Data is only available up to December 2024 due to the lag in the national verification process. The percentage of household waste sent to energy recovery sits at 34.1%. Performance is generally a result of available markets to accept the material from the Mechanical Biological Treatment process at affordable cost. Ultimately, the more waste, after recycling, that is sent to energy recovery reduces the amount of waste landfilled. Darlington Borough Council is below the North East average, as in most cases other North East authorities have a primary contract through energy recovery facilities.



Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Local Environment

Key Deliverable: Introduce food waste collections and support residents to increase overall recycling rates to move towards the national average

**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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## **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT 2025-26**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -**  
**Councillor Anne Marie Curry, Adults Portfolio**

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

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## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the capital resources available for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) during 2025/26 and to seek Members' approval for the release of these resources to be utilised in accordance with Darlington Borough Council Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025.

### **Summary**

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

### **Recommendations**

4. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) It is noted that the sum of £1,319,439 has been allocated to the Council to use for Disabled Facilities Grant adaptations in 2025-2026, plus a previous additional in year allocation of £159,595 in 2024-25.
  - (b) The capital funding for 2025-26 and the additional capital funding for 2024-25 is released to enable it to be allocated in accordance with Darlington Borough Council

## Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025.

### **Reasons**

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reason: to enable the adaptations for those individuals who are eligible to receive a DFG for 2025-26 to proceed.

**James Stroyan,  
Executive Director of People**

### **Background Papers**

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

Lisa Holdsworth : Extension 5851



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

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

6. The purpose of DFGs is to fund adaptations to owner-occupiers, tenants of private rented properties and Housing Association tenants to enable people with a disability to remain in their own home and live independently across the Borough. Adaptations can include ramps, stair lifts and suitable heating systems. The DFG, which has run for more than 30 years, became part of the Better Care Fund (BCF) in April 2015.
7. DFGs are national mandatory grants and are available to adults and children with a disability. The maximum grant payable is £30,000 per application and is subject to a statutory means test to determine if the individual is able to contribute to the cost of the works. Following the approval of the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025, means tests are only undertaken for ground floor extensions and garage conversions and continue not to apply to grant applications for disabled children.
8. Under the Councils' Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025 a further grant can also be awarded where significant alterations or extensions are required.
9. Durham County Council Home Improvement Agency is commissioned by Darlington Borough Council to provide support to individuals applying for a DFG. This service includes the completion of the grant application, the seeking of quotes for the necessary works, selection of a suitable contractor, oversight of the works up to completion and payment of the grant. The agency will also support individuals to source charitable funding where the client is required to make a contribution to the costs of the works but is unable to do so.

### Financial Implications

10. For 2025-2026 the allocation made to Darlington Borough Council via the Better Care Fund is £1,319,439.
11. An additional in year allocation of £159,595 was also made on 13 February 2025.
12. Members are required to formally release the monies available to the Council for DFG for 2025-26 and the additional in year allocation in 2024-25 as it is a capital resource.

### Carbon Impact and Climate Change

13. The installation of more efficient equipment via DFG will reduce energy usage and provide higher levels of thermal comfort for dwellings benefitting from these measures thus reducing carbon emissions.

### Equalities considerations

14. An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (**Appendix 1**) was carried out in relation to the introduction of the DFG and RRO Policy which was approved by members in 2023.

15. The outcome of this screening was that the introduction of the RRO Policy will not have any adverse effects on people with the protected characteristics and officers did not identify any potential disadvantage to these groups. The policies provide additional support to eligible individuals in the form of grants/reduced contributions and as such have a positive impact for all recipients.
16. Since the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025 was implemented, the amount of DFG carry forward in 2024-25 has reduced to £610,667.87. This is due to the revised policy being successful in broadening access to DFGs, as intended.
17. Due to the increased level of demand and expenditure, a risk prioritisation tool was introduced to ensure those in most urgent need of the grant due to risk are prioritised within the application process and timescales. This is monitored through bi-monthly meetings. An EIA was completed in respect of this (**Appendix 2**) with no adverse impacts identified, as individuals waiting for grant applications will be provided with appropriate advice or support. All individuals have regular communication from Adult Services to update on their position.
18. As the funds which are requested to be released will be used in accordance with the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025 and risk prioritisation tool, no further EIA is required.

## **Consultation**

19. Consultation took place in October and November 2022 as part of the development of the Disabled Facilities Grant and Regulatory Reform Order Policy 2022-2025. The release of the capital funding will enable DFG to continue to be made in accordance with the approved policy.

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### Initial equality impact assessment screening form

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

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

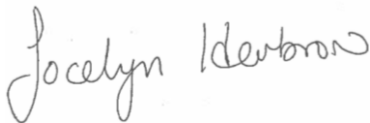
**Is there likely to be an adverse impact on people with any of the following protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, or any other socially excluded groups?**

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

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

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

Protected characteristic	Yes	No	Don't know/ Info not available
Age		x	
Disability		x	
Sex (gender)		x	
Race		x	
Sexual Orientation		x	
Religion or belief		x	
Gender reassignment		x	
Pregnancy or maternity		x	
Marriage or civil partnership		x	
<b>Other</b>			
Carer (unpaid family or friend)		x	
Low Income		x	
Rural Location		x	
<b>Does the activity relate to an area where there are known inequalities/probable impacts (e.g. disabled people's access to public transport)? Please give details.</b>	The updated policies will cover all areas of the Borough equally irrespective of known inequalities etc.		
<b>Will the activity have a significant effect on how other organisations operate? (e.g. partners, funding criteria, etc.). Do any of these organisations support people with protected characteristics? Please explain why you have reached this conclusion.</b>	The activity will not have a significant effect on how other organisations operate. However, there is the potential that by broadening the Council's ability to provide individuals with adaptations to their homes, this may reduce or delay the needs for services commissioned from Adult Social Care.		
<b>Decision (Please tick one option)</b>	EIA not relevant or proportionate:	x	Continue to full EIA:
<b>Reason for Decision</b>	<p>A full EIA is not required as the suggested amendments to the existing DFG and RRO Policies will not have any adverse effects on the above protected characteristics.</p> <p>The suggested updates seek to broaden access to support to eligible individuals, including: widening the support that can accessed via a DFG; waiving the existing means test in some instances to enable more equitable access to the same form of provision, e.g. stairlifts and also increasing the timeliness in which a DFG can be processed; raising the recovery threshold iro DFG funding. These changes will have a positive impact for all recipients and promote their independence.</p> <p>Feedback received during the consultation process from 25.10.22 – 28.11.22 identified positive impacts from the proposals made, although it was queried what would happen if there was insufficient funding to implement all the proposals.</p>		

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



# **DARLINGTON**

Borough Council

## **Equality Impact Assessment Record Form**

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

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

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

<b>Title of activity:</b>		
<b>Name of Directorate and Service Area:</b>		
<b>Lead Officer and contact details</b>		
<b>Assistant Director accountable for this EIA</b>		
<b>Who else will be involved in carrying out the EIA:</b>		
<b>When did the EIA process start?</b>		



## Section 2 – The Activity and Supporting Information

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

## Section 3: Assessment

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

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

#### Section 4: Cumulative Impacts

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

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

#### Section 5: Analysis

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

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

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

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

## Section 6 - Sign-off when assessment is completed

<b>Officer Completing the Form:</b>		
<b>Signed</b>	<b>Name:</b>	
	<b>Date:</b>	
	<b>Job Title:</b>	
<b>Assistant Director:</b>		
<b>Signed</b>	<b>Name:</b>	
	<b>Date:</b>	
	<b>Service:</b>	

## Section 7 – Reporting of Findings and Recommendations to Decision Makers

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

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

## Section 8 – Action Plan and Performance Management

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

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

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

**Initial equality impact assessment screening form**

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

<b>Directorate:</b>	People Group
<b>Service Area:</b>	The DFG sits within Adult Services responsibility but includes children due to Occupational Therapy and DFG function also covering children services)
<b>Activity being screened:</b>	Disabled Facilities Grant process and approval changes
<b>Officer(s) carrying out the screening:</b>	Barbara Beadle
<b>What are you proposing to do?</b>	Introduce a new pathway with governance which and apply a risk assessment which evidence risk and impact on the person awaiting for a DFG. This is due to the increased demand for DFG and needing to support and progress those at highest need, risk and urgency. This will lead to longer waits and delays for people who are identified as lower priority due to risk and impact analysis.
<b>Why are you proposing this? What are the desired outcomes?</b>	<b>DFG</b> The demand for DFG has increased significantly across the last 10 months. There is the need for a revised governance process to manage the demand, risk and urgency. <b>Desired outcome</b> - to progress with DFG for major works for those people evidencing the highest risk and impact following OT assessment.
<b>Does the activity involve a significant commitment or removal of resources?</b> Please give details	There is no removal of resource. The new pathway once fully embedded will align to the current governance structure of adult social care via discussion/ supervision/ practice support forum and DFG forums – no additional resource required.

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

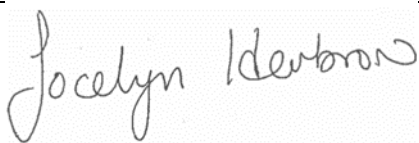
**As part of this assessment, please consider the following questions:**

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

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

Protected characteristic	Yes	No	Don't know/ Info not available
Age		x	
Disability		x	
Sex (gender)		x	
Race		x	
Sexual Orientation		x	
Religion or belief		x	
Gender reassignment		X	
Pregnancy or maternity		X	
Marriage or civil partnership		X	
<b>Other</b>			
Carer (unpaid family or friend)		x	
Low Income		x	
Rural Location		x	
<b>Does the activity relate to an area where there are known inequalities/probable impacts (e.g. disabled people's access to public transport)? Please give details.</b>	Please note although DFG major work delays will impact on people living with a disability and their carers, the pathway is determined solely by risk and impact on the person and therefore those at highest risk and impact will be processed ahead of those of lower risk and impact following application of a screening tool. This screening is focused solely on the individual's ability to meet needs within their property and to support carers where appropriate and not based on any protected characteristics.		
<b>Will the activity have a significant effect on how other organisations operate? (e.g. partners, funding criteria, etc.). Do any of these organisations support people with protected characteristics? Please explain why you have reached this conclusion.</b>	<b>No impact on other organisations</b> This conclusion has been reached from the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where people have increased needs resulting in a Package of Care (POC) or increased POC whilst awaiting a DFG to meet needs this will be identified in the risk prioritisation screening and prioritised.</li> <li>- Home improvement Agency activity aligns to demand and works across Durham and Darlington therefore activity can flex around demand fluctuations.</li> </ul>		
<b>Decision (Please tick one option)</b>	EIA not relevant or proportionate:	x	Continue to full EIA:
<b>Reason for Decision</b>	There was no clear governance or risk management approach to the administration of DFG. The introduction of this process ensures that those with the greatest risks and		



	needs are prioritised. Whilst there will be an impact on people with disabilities and their carers these risks will be minimised through assessment to identify alternative support or arrangements whilst awaiting a decision on DFG applications. The implementation of the process will not deliver a significant adverse impact.
Signed (Assistant Director)	
Date	24/10/2024 (reviewed and revised 23/05/2025

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**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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**HOUSING SERVICES FIRE SAFETY POLICY FOR PURPOSE-BUILT BLOCKS OF FLATS,  
SHELTERED AND EXTRA CARE ACCOMMODATION 2025-2030**

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

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

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. For Cabinet to approve the Housing Services Fire Safety Policy for Purpose-Built Blocks of Flats, Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation 2025-2030.

**Summary**

2. Members will recall that Cabinet approved the existing Housing Services Fire Safety Policy 2022-2027 on 6 December 2022. This policy covered the fire safety arrangements for Council owned sheltered and extra care accommodation.
3. Since then, work has been ongoing in developing a fire safety policy for Council owned purpose-built blocks of flats. Rather than present a separate policy for Members to consider, a single policy covering all Council owned accommodation with communal areas has been developed, updated with the latest legislation and best practice guidance.
4. The Housing Services Fire Safety Policy for Purpose-Built Blocks of Flats, Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation 2025-2030 at **Appendix 1** sets out how we will provide staff, residents, visitors and partner organisations in these types of accommodation with clear guidelines as to how to prevent fires and what action to take in the event of a fire, to protect themselves and others.
5. The Tenants Panel has been consulted on the draft policy, and they have given their full support. This report was considered by the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 18 June 2025, who agreed its onward submission for consideration by Cabinet.

## Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- (a) Consider the contents of this report, and
  - (b) Approve the Housing Services Fire Safety Policy for Purpose-Built Blocks of Flats, Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation 2025-2030 at Appendix 1.

## Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) Darlington Borough Council has a duty to comply with fire safety legislation.
  - (b) The Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards places a duty on social housing landlords to provide their tenants with quality, safe accommodation.
  - (c) The adoption of a formal Fire Safety Policy is one of the ways to demonstrate how we will achieve both compliance with the legislation and the Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards.

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

## Background Papers

- (i) The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- (ii) The Fire Safety Act 2021.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's HOMES priority to provide affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents
Addressing inequalities	An equality impact assessment screening form has been completed in relation to this policy, but no adverse impacts have been identified on people with any protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Efficient and effective use of resources	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Health and Wellbeing	This policy sets out our commitment to protecting staff, tenants, visitors, partner organisations and contractors from the effects of fire within all our properties.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All wards with Council owned purpose-built blocks of flats, sheltered and extra care accommodation
Groups Affected	All Council tenants in those types of accommodation

Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	This report does not represent an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	There are no issues which this report needs to address

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The Housing Services Fire Safety Policy for Purpose-Built Blocks of Flats, Sheltered and Extra Care Accommodation 2025-2030 at Appendix 1 sets out how we will provide staff, residents, visitors and partner organisations in these types of accommodation with clear guidelines as to how to prevent fires and what action to take in the event of a fire, to protect themselves and others.
9. The policy covers the following areas:
  - (a) **Relevant legislation:** This section sets out the relevant fire safety legislation that Darlington Borough Council must comply with as part of our statutory duties to provide our tenants with safe homes.
  - (b) **Scope:** This section sets out the aims and the purpose of the policy and links to our corporate fire safety arrangements.
  - (c) **Responsibilities:** This section sets out the responsibilities of Darlington Borough Council in relation to fire safety, together with the responsibilities of tenants and visitors.
  - (d) **Arrangements:** This section sets out the specific arrangements in relation to this policy, including fire risk assessments, evacuation procedures and our stay put policy, record keeping, training and instructions.
  - (e) **Fire Safety Information for purpose-built flats, sheltered and extra care accommodation:** This section sets out the specific fire safety information for each different type of accommodation such as, the fire detection and alarm systems, firefighting equipment, fire doors, fire protection, signage, sprinklers and smoke control systems.

### Outcome of Consultation

10. The Tenants Panel has been consulted on the draft policy, and they have given their full support.

### **Equalities considerations**

11. An equality impact assessment screening form has been completed in relation to this policy, but no adverse impacts have been identified on people with any protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

# **Darlington Borough Council**

## **Housing Services**

### **Fire Safety Policy for purpose-built blocks of flats, Sheltered and Extra Care schemes**

**2025 - 2030**

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## 2 Relevant legislation

## 3 Scope

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### Appendix 2 Fire safety information specific for purpose-built blocks of flats

### Appendix 3 Fire safety information specific for Sheltered and Extra Care Schemes

### Appendix 4 General fire safety information



# 1 Introduction

We are committed to protecting staff, tenants, visitors, partner organisations and contractors from the effects of fire within all our properties. We are accountable for tenant fire safety as a social housing provider and are responsible for ensuring suitable management to tenant fire safety to ensure:

- Tenants feel safe in their homes.
- The requirements of regulatory standards are met.
- Relevant fire safety legislation is complied with.
- We eliminate and reduce fire hazards in our premises.
- We increase fire safety awareness for our tenants.
- We have robust fire risk assessment processes
- We prevent the spread of fire and have early warning and notification to Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

This policy is applicable to all residential purpose-built blocks of flats, sheltered, and extra care accommodation we own and/or manage. There is a separate Fire Policy for workplaces and non-residential properties.

Fire is a significant hazard to the safety of both buildings and their occupants. We are committed to ensuring fire safety is managed through the provision of suitable, sufficient and risk appropriate fire precautions and management systems to enable the safe evacuation of staff, tenants, and others and to minimise fire damage should a fire occur.

This Policy describes the fire precautions and management arrangements we have put in place to ensure that the risk of fire is effectively managed and delivers compliance with all applicable fire safety legislation and industry best practice.

## 2 Relevant Legislation

We have a duty to comply with the requirements of fire safety legislation, fire safety guidance and best practice:

- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRFSO 2005) brought together different pieces of fire legislation. It applies to all non-domestic premises, including communal areas of residential buildings with multiple homes. RRFSO 2005 designates those in control of premises as the responsible person for fire safety and they have a duty to undertake assessments and manage risks. RRFSO 2005 is enforced by the Fire and Rescue Authorities.
- The Fire Safety Act 2021 sets out to amend the RRFSO 2005 and is designed to ensure that people “feel safe in their own homes and that a tragedy like the Grenfell Tower fire

never happens again” in England. The Act clarifies that for any building containing two or more sets of domestic premises, the RRFSO 2005 applies to the building’s structure and external walls and any common parts, including the front doors of residential areas.

- It also clarifies that references to external walls in the RRFSO 2005 include “doors or windows in those walls” and “anything attached to the exterior of those walls (including balconies).” These amendments to the RRFSO 2005 aim to increase enforcement action in these areas, particularly where remediation of aluminium composite material cladding is not taking place.

In summary, the Duty Holder/building owner for multi-occupied, residential buildings will manage the risk of fire for:

1. The structure and external walls of the building (such as cladding, balconies and windows)
2. Entrance doors to individual flats that open into communal areas.

This is also supported by other legislation including, but not limited to:

- The Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards
- The Housing Act 2004
- The Building Regulations Approved Document B – Fire Safety
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Electrical Equipment (safety) Regulations 1994
- The Local Government Guide "Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of Flats" (blocks with communal areas).
- Dangerous Substance and explosive atmospheres Regulations (DSEAR) 2002.
- The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations

#### **Guidance Documents**

- Fire Sector Federation ACOP - A National Framework for Fire Risk Assessor Competency
- Fire Sector Federation - A Guide to Choosing a Competent Fire Risk Assessor
- Fire Risk Assessment in Residential Care Homes
- Fire Safety Risk Assessment: Means of Escape for Disabled People
- HSE Fire Safety Webpages
- PAS 79-2:2020 Housing – British Standards BSI
- PAS 9980:2022, Fire risk appraisal of external wall construction and cladding of existing blocks of flats – Code of practice
- BS991 Fire safety in the design, management, and use of residential buildings. Code of practice (under review)
- PIBS\_Guide\_06-21\_V2.pdf ([nationalfirechiefs.org.uk](http://nationalfirechiefs.org.uk))

Under the Regulator of Social Housing’s consumer standards, all registered providers of social housing have an obligation for their tenants’ safety, which includes fire safety. The objectives of the Regulator are set out in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.

We are accountable for overall tenant fire safety and are responsible to ensure tenants feel safe in their homes and the requirements of the regulatory standards are met.

### 3 Scope

The purpose of this fire safety policy is to provide staff, tenants, visitors, contractors, and partner organisations with clear guidelines of what action they should take to protect themselves and others.

We take our responsibilities to manage the risk from fires within our managed housing stock very seriously and strive to reduce this risk through:

- Defined roles and responsibilities for fire safety, including individual responsibilities, which are outlined in the corporate [Fire Safety Arrangement](#).
- Compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, Fire Safety Act 2021, and any other relevant legislation.
- Ensuring fire safety is included when designing and constructing new and/or refurbishment projects.
- Ensuring that appropriate funding is allocated where deficiencies in fire safety measures are identified and the remedial actions taken.
- A comprehensive programme of fire risk assessments, undertaken by competent person(s).
- Ensuring suitable and sufficient fire precautions and management systems are in place.
- A programme of regular fire safety inspections based on building risk.
- Providing regular fire safety awareness updates to tenants, staff, and others every three years, unless significant changes to fire safety have occurred sooner.
- A programme of regular fire door inspections.
- Where required, we will provide a Property Information Box (PIB) at the main entrance of the building, which holds all relevant fire information on the building and residents for the fire service.
- Making information on the specific fire safety arrangements in each residential building of two or more domestic properties readily available to:
  - Tenants, to ensure they are assured that the risk of injury or damage to their homes caused by fire is minimised.
  - Staff, contractors, visitors.
  - Fostering and maintaining good working relationships with partner services and relevant stakeholders, including Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

## 4 Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all staff and tenants to maintain good housekeeping within both communal areas and individual accommodation and to report any defect found to Housing Services at the earliest opportunity.

The following outlines the responsibilities we have in relation to fire safety for tenanted properties with purpose-built blocks of flats with two or more domestic flats.

We are a landlord and building manager in respect of our managed housing stock with communal areas and supported living residential accommodation.

To meet our responsibilities as an employer and landlord we will ensure that tenants feel safe in their homes and the risk from fires is effectively managed.

We have identified a number of objectives for all our managed housing stock of domestic properties with two or more flats.

### **Responsibilities of Darlington Borough Council:**

- A responsible person will be appointed and be aware of all the areas of responsibility.
- Fire Risk Assessments have been undertaken by competent persons in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and current standards.
- Fire Safety measures are included in all new construction projects, existing building renovations and improvement programmes.
- Fire Safety risks posed by the structure and external walls (including cladding, balconies and windows and front doors) are assessed in line with current standards.
- The ongoing suitability and effectiveness of current fire safety measures in buildings classed as 'Low Risk' are reviewed at least every 3 years or after a fire incident, as part of the overall fire risk assessment process.
- Fire safety priorities, improvement areas and areas of non-compliance are identified and actioned.
- All relevant residential buildings under our control will, where appropriate, have adequate fire warning systems, signs, means of escape and fire-fighting equipment.
- All fire safety precautions are inspected, maintained, serviced, and tested to ensure they are always fully operational, in accordance with statutory requirements and manufacturer's instructions.
- Regular inspections are undertaken of communal areas to ensure good housekeeping practices are in place to minimise the risk and spread of fire.
- Gas and electrical safety inspections are undertaken in each of our residential properties to ensure that these do not present a fire risk to the tenant or building.
- Staff are provided with the necessary skills and training to undertake their duties defined in this policy in relation to fire safety.
- Suitable and sufficient records are kept and available to be audited at appropriate intervals.

- We keep up to date with changing legislation and fire mitigation measures.

#### **Responsibilities of tenants and visitors:**

- To comply with the requirements of this fire safety policy.
- To follow instructions provided by our staff and/or members of the fire and rescue service.

## **5 Arrangements**

We have a duty under fire safety legislation to carry out fire risk assessments of all residential properties comprising of two or more domestic flats.

We have a number of arrangements in place to minimise the risk of fire. The day-to-day arrangements to managing the risks of fire is underpinned by:

- A programme of comprehensive fire risk assessments, including:
  1. Assessing the risk from fire, including a building's structure, the external walls (including doors or windows in those walls, anything attached to the exterior of those walls such as balconies) and any common parts, plus all doors between the domestic premises and common parts.
  2. Evaluating the adequacy of existing fire protection measures and identifying additional measures that minimise the risk of fires starting and spreading.
  3. Assessing compliance with all relevant legislation and relevant standards.
- The provision and maintenance of appropriate fire detection, alarm systems, emergency lighting, fire-fighting equipment (where in place), evacuation signage, appropriate means of escape and protected escape routes in communal areas of residential properties.
- The provision of essential training and fire safety information for all staff and tenants.
- Appropriate instructions for contractors and other visitors on the actions to be taken in the event of a fire in any property they may be working in.
- The reporting, reviewing and investigation of all fire related incidents and measures put in place to prevent a recurrence, where possible.
- A zero-tolerance relating to the storing of items by tenants in communal areas.
- Strict enforcement of no-smoking in communal areas.

### **5.1 Fire Risk Assessments**

The level and complexity of any fire risk assessment undertaken in residential buildings, comprising of more than two flats, that we own and/or manage varies dependant on risk. A schedule of fire risk assessments has been drawn up and these will be undertaken by competent persons or third parties, depending on risk.

A fire risk assessment will:

- Identify the fire hazards, including those posed by the structure of the walls, doors, and windows.
- Identify people at risk.
- Evaluate, remove, or reduce the risks.
- Record findings, prepare an emergency plan and provide training.
- Be reviewed and updated regularly, in particular when something changes that could affect fire safety or where there it is no longer valid, such as. a change in:  
occupancy.  
the building.  
nature of contents or after a fire.

Fire Safety risk assessments will include:

- The structural ability of the building and individual flat to withstand fire, prevent fire spread and contain a fire in a single flat, where a Stay Put fire evacuation policy is in place.
- Emergency routes and exits.
- Fire detection and warning systems.
- Firefighting equipment.
- The removal or safe storage of dangerous substances.
- Details of the emergency fire evacuation strategy. Details of any vulnerable tenants, where known, with temporary or permanent disabilities, including mobility issues or sensory impairment(s).
- Providing information to tenants, staff, and other people on the premises.
- Fire safety training for staff.

Actions arising from any fire risk assessment will be acted upon in a timely manner. This means the fire risk assessor will update the fire action log and assign officers to respond to those within a period as specified by the risk priority that the fire risk assessor has determined from the guidance. These fit into priorities and timescales:

Timescales

- 1) Immediately
- 2) Short Term
- 3) Medium Term
- 4) Long Term
- 5) Consideration for future implementation

Priorities

- a) High
- b) Medium
- c) Low

These actions are reviewed and reported within the Housing Compliance meetings.

All fire risk assessments will be reviewed frequently, which is generally every three years, but may be sooner, by a competent person and updated to reflect any changes in the building or

recommend whether a more comprehensive fire risk assessment is required due to more significant changes.

## 5.2 Fire Risk Assessment types

Type	Definition
1	<p>Type 1 Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) is non-destructive, and the most common. This type of survey focusses on identifying visible hazards and concerns without any intrusive or destructive work. It assesses all the common parts of a building, such as a lobby area in a shared block of flats – but not individual dwellings. In some cases, a Type 1 FRA will inspect construction points between individual dwellings (such as shared supportive walls).</p> <p>Type 1 FRA's have the purpose of ensuring that common parts of a building have the arrangements which allow people to escape if there was to be a fire – such as clear signage pointing to entry and exit points.</p> <p>The results of a Type 1 FRA may reveal the requirement for further FRAs. If this is the case, the Type 1 FRA will list reasons why this would be required.</p>
2	<p>Type 2 Fire Risk Assessments are normally only recommended if a Type 1 FRA concluded that there may be serious structural flaws in a building which may increase the risk of fire spreading.</p> <p>Type 2 FRA includes destructive sampling. This will involve intrusive and destructive methods to assess hidden hazards. This will require repairs to be carried out following the assessment. This applies to common areas only.</p>
3	<p>Type 3 Fire Risk Assessment is comprehensive. This type of assessment covers all common areas of a building – and individual dwellings.</p> <p>Type 3 FRA considers all means of escapes (including those within individual dwellings), structures, and compartmentation between flats and any means of fire detection.</p> <p>Type 3 FRA is non-destructive – and is usually only considered necessary if there are fire risks within individual dwellings. This type of survey focusses on identifying visible hazards and concerns without any intrusive or destructive work.</p>
4	<p>Type 4 Fire Risk Assessments are similar to Type 2 FRAs, as they include a destructive sampling, but in both the common parts of a building and living areas – such as apartments. This will involve intrusive and destructive methods to assess hidden hazards. Type 4 FRAs are more comprehensive – and complicated to complete. This is because access to individual dwellings is required, and destructive sampling can lead to a need for repairs.</p>

### 5.3 Low risk residential properties

All blocks of flats owned by us have been identified as low risk as they are below 11m in height and basic design/layout and are purpose-built blocks of flats.

A medium risk building is defined as being between 11m and 18m with high risk being over 18m. We do not have any buildings which meet those criteria.

Sheltered schemes are lower than the 11m rule but due to the complexity they are classified as a medium risk.

Type 3 FRA's are undertaken by a team of competent in-house fire risk assessors for low-risk properties every 3 years. Individuals in the team have a recognised level of competence that includes a formal fire risk assessment qualification and are an accredited fire risk assessor. Where an assessment is carried out by an external fire risk assessor, they will also have the same level of competency and be an accredited fire risk assessor.

### 5.4 Fire Risk Assessment Outcomes

We will undertake any outcomes and actions from a fire risk assessment (FRA). Where destructive FRAs result in the need to complete building work to reduce identified fire risks, including additional ventilation, to allow smoke to escape or additional fire compartmentation additions, we will complete these within agreed timescales. All actions will be reviewed to identify the practicality and viability of the recommendation. In some cases, in line with legislation, it may be identified that some recommendations are not implemented, for example a sprinkler system.

### 5.5 Asbestos Considerations

If destructive FRA's are to be undertaken, we will provide information on the presence of any asbestos and commission a Refurbishment and Demolition (R&D) survey as required. This is in line with our [Asbestos Management Health and Safety Arrangement](#)

### 5.6 Shared Occupation/Lettings/Landlord Responsibilities

In the case of residential buildings we own and/or manage but other service providers are contracted in to provide the services provided within the building such as, homeless and temporary accommodation, care and support services to elderly and vulnerable, clear fire safety arrangements will be in place as to who is responsible for managing the day-to-day fire safety arrangements.

We are responsible for ensuring that a fire risk assessment is undertaken. This may require communication and cooperation between all parties to ensure coordination of fire safety provisions, fire-fighting measures, evacuation procedures etc.



In the event that part of a building may be let, the building manager has the responsibility to ensure that those hiring the site are aware of the fire risk assessment for the site and evacuation procedure, including contact names in the event of an emergency.

## 5.7 Reporting of Fire Incidents

Any incidents of fire, regardless of how minor, will be reported to Housing managers, which includes the Responsible Person and recorded on the Councils EcoOnline system. Incidents will be investigated, and lessons learnt to prevent a recurrence.

We will liaise with external emergency services, where required, to minimise the potential risks that could arise from activities where there is a reportable incident related to fire within properties that we manage.

## 5.8 Fire Evacuation

We operate an evacuation policy in our purpose-built residential buildings with more than two sets of flats and will have a clearly defined evacuation strategy, determined by our fire risk assessments and overall risk to the occupants. This does not include our sheltered housing and extra care schemes, the evacuation strategy for those is outlined in section 5.9.

Tenants will be made aware of the fire safety and evacuation arrangements in place in the building they live in. This will be made available at sign-up and on display in noticeboards in the communal areas. Any evacuation plan will include:

- The actions tenants should take if they discover a fire.
- How people will be warned if there is a fire and how this is linked to the fire service and landlord.
- Key escape routes, how people can gain access to them and escape from them to places of safety.
- Arrangements for the safe evacuation of people identified as being especially at risk, such as young children and babies and those with disabilities or cognitive impairments.
- Where people should assemble after they have left the building and clear directions to the assembly point.

Although this is in place at present, we are working with the new regulations and the fire service to implement those changes. This means that during the lifetime of this policy we will move to a stay put policy as outlined in section 5.9.

## 5.9 Stay Put Policy

### **Purpose built blocks of flats**

Following the changes to the guidance to the Building Regulations Part B and National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) guidance, we operate a 'Stay Put' policy in most of our residential buildings containing self-contained flats and communal areas. This requires occupants not directly affected by any fire to stay in their flat. This is regularly reviewed as part of the fire risk assessment, to ensure it is the safest strategy to employ. The 'Stay Put' policy may change during a major fire event and this decision will be managed by the Incident Commander from the fire and rescue service dealing with the emergency situation at the time.

Additionally, we will have internal procedures in place for responding to a fire incident in any of our properties, including procedures for liaising with the fire and rescue service on arrival, and notifying them of any special risks or vulnerable tenants.

The following points are further measure we may take consideration of following a fire risk assessment or guidance change in conjunction with the fire service:

- Further protect fire exit routes.
- Develop procedures for evacuating persons who are unable to use the stairs in an emergency, or who may require assistance (such as disabled people, older people, and young children).
- Work in conjunction with the Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service to develop policies for partial and total evacuation of purpose built residential flat blocks.
- Draw up and keep under regular review evacuation plans. Copies, where required, will be provided in electronic and/or paper form to Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.
- Include up-to-date information about persons with reduced mobility and their associated Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs).
- Install sprinkler systems in high-risk residential buildings that will further safeguard tenants in their own home, in the event of a fire.

### **Sheltered and Extra Care schemes**

A stay put policy is in place for all sheltered and extra care schemes due to the medical condition and degree of awareness of some tenants that can result in them not being capable of being moved easily during an evacuation or fire alarm scenario. They may become confused and disorientated if permitted to leave the building without adequate supervision or assistance.

The stay put policy for sheltered and extra care schemes is based on the factors below. Should any item not be in place, a review will be undertaken to assess the risk, and the findings will be recorded.

- The building has a full working and maintained fire alarm system for communal areas.
- Each flat has working and maintained wired smoke detection.
- Fire doors, glazing and door furniture meet the FD30 standard.
- Suitable compartmentation throughout the building.
- Concrete floors.
- Emergency lighting installed and maintained.

- Annual gas safety checks (flats and communal).
- Good standards of housekeeping throughout.
- Fire retardant soft furnishings (communal areas).
- No Smoking policy in place and enforced in communal areas.
- The building has an up-to-date Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) in place.
- Firefighting equipment in place and serviced, such as fire blankets.
- Portable appliance testing (PAT) up to date on items in communal areas of the building.

## 5.10 Keeping records – Fire Logbook

We will keep records of tests, maintenance and safety training relating to each residential building of two or more flats. An effective way of demonstrating compliance is to keep records in a well-maintained fire logbook.

We will keep records up to date and readily available for inspection by any visiting authority, including, but not limited to, the Health & Safety Executive, Regulator of Social Housing or Fire Service when required. Records that will be kept include:

- Fire alarm system - record of testing, maintenance, and false alarms (where applicable).
- Emergency lighting – record of testing and maintenance (where applicable).
- A record of any visits by the Fire and Rescue Service or other enforcing authorities.

All records of servicing by nominated contracted servicing companies will be retained and kept.

## 5.11 Training and Instruction

We will provide appropriate fire safety awareness training to staff. Staff, tenants, visitors, partner organisations and contractors will receive information on the fire safety arrangements in the building where they live or work, and the action they need to take in the case of a fire.

Staff working in residential properties will be instructed by their line manager in the following:

- What to do if there is a fire.
- What to do if the fire alarm sounds.
- The location of the nearest fire alarm.
- The location of the nearest fire exit, as well as a secondary route.
- The location and route to the designated assembly point(s).

All staff are required to complete regular refresher training every three years, however staff working in residential care premises and services, which include sleeping accommodation, receive specific training included, but not limited to, fire panel training, use of firefighting equipment and how to use extinguishers. Although staff are trained in the use of firefighting equipment, staff are not expected to tackle fires.

## 6 Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed and updated every five years, or if there are any significant changes to current fire Legislation, HSE approved codes of practice or guidance, or as the result of the outcome of an incident review.

## 7 Sheltered and Extra Care Scheme Specific building information

### **Our Schemes**

Sheltered properties are contained under the same roof, however all are individual flats. All schemes have communal lounges together with gardens, guest rooms, laundry, bin storage, mobility scooter store, security and safety features. Some have hair salons and meeting rooms. Communal areas can also be used by the wider community by prior arrangement.

Extra care schemes are similar in design to sheltered schemes but also have care staff on site 24 hours daily who provide social care.

All schemes have a Scheme Manager providing good neighbourly low level tenant support, housing management and delivery of activities during the normal working day Monday to Friday 08-30 to 17:00 (16:30 on Fridays) with Response Officers available at all other times.

Each property is linked to the Darlington Lifeline Control Centre, ensuring there is a 24-hour emergency response should the Scheme Manager be off duty.

## Construction Features

Our schemes provide independent living with communal facilities. Each property was constructed to the standards and regulations applicable at the time of build. Each subsequent remodelling scheme has also followed this process providing some degree of compartmentation.

Construction is typically, concrete floors, solid wall construction between flats and flats to communal spaces, FD30 Fire Doors on entrance to the flats, within corridors and onto the stair enclosures. The roof void is also sub-divided by the apartment walls.

It is key to note that:

- The travel distances for means of escape in case of fire in the existing buildings were suitable for its existing use.
- Any remodelling works undertaken includes fire doors within the flats, an upgrading of the fire doors and frames to also prevent the passage of smoke, reinstatement of the cavity barriers in the roof and ceiling voids.

General repairs and maintenance will be carried out to the building/structure in a manner that will not compromise the compartmentation in communal areas and/or between flats or any means of escape or egress from the building.

All staff and contractors working in the building will be suitably supervised and managed to prevent compromising the compartmentation while maintaining fire exit routes and ensuring good housekeeping is always kept.

## Fire Alarm System

All Sheltered and Extra Care schemes have a fire alarm designed (as a minimum) to L2 Standard that was applicable at the time of design; the systems will be permanently connected to a fire alarm monitoring centre, located at the CCTV centre in the Town Hall Darlington. Each Fire Alarm System will be maintained as required in BS5839.

Within individual flats, as a minimum a combined heat and smoke detector will be fitted in the entrance hall area that forms a part of the building's L2 fire detection system, which also connects to the voice call system. Each apartment will also be provided with domestic smoke/heat detection to the kitchen and corridor.

In all sheltered accommodation schemes, activation of the fire alarm will trigger a response from:

- A duty member of staff on site (the Scheme Manager or a member of the care team) to the voice module within the apartment. Should this not be responded to, the activation will default to the fire alarm monitoring centre (CCTV)

or

- The fire alarm monitoring centre (CCTV) to the voice module within the accommodation unit.

In all Extra care accommodation units, activation of the fire alarm will trigger a response from:

- A duty member of staff on site (the Scheme Manager or a member of the care team) to the voice module within the apartment. Should this not be responded to, the activation will default to the fire alarm monitoring centre (CCTV).

Any no responses or an unsatisfactory response from the occupant will be investigated by the carer or Lifeline staff and emergency services will be contacted. An adequate response from the occupant and the sounder ceasing will result in the call being closed, with the safeguard that any second activation and/or no response or inadequate response will result in the full emergency procedures being followed. Instructions for tenants on the actions to take if they discover a fire or on hearing the fire alarm, are in Appendix 2.

In communal areas, smoke detectors and heat detectors will be installed throughout the building, with manual call points located at each exit. Activation of any of the smoke detectors will result in activation of the fire alarm and will result in the actions as detailed in Appendix 2 by the following persons:

- Tenants, their visitors, other visitors, and contractors.
- Staff on site.
- Staff on call.
- Alarm Receiving Centre.
- Staff from partner organisations.

Activation of a manual call point (break glass) or any smoke/heat detector in the communal areas will result in activation of the full fire alarm.

All activations of the fire alarm system will be recorded. This information will include.

- Location of the unit activated.
- The reason for activation.
- Actions taken following the investigation into the activation of the alarm.
- On site staff attendance within 3 minutes of the detector head detecting the fire situation (this is to allow some investigation if members of staff are on site and prevent unnecessary disruption of vulnerable residents).
- Off-site staff (Lifeline response officers) will respond within a 30-minute time frame, but Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service may already be in attendance.

All existing staff will be trained in fire safety and new staff will be working towards this. They will have suitable and sufficient building and procedure knowledge to cope with any situation that may arise. Further 24-hour support will be provided by managers and supervisors.

## Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) and Care Assessments

A comprehensive list of tenants, who may require assistance to evacuate the building, will be maintained close to the main fire alarm control panel. The list will be immediately accessible to the Fire and Rescue Service on their arrival and, where possible, will be presented to them by a member of staff on duty. Any client information will be held in the fire document safe located next to the fire panel and is secured using a code known only to staff, and CCTV Control Centre, who will inform the Fire and Rescue Service of the code on request.

When required, a PEEP will be jointly developed by the tenant and Lifeline Services. This will aim to address how the tenant can safely exit the building during an emergency. A copy of the PEEP will be placed in the Property Information Box (PIB).

A Care Assessment will be completed prior to any tenant moving into Extra Care accommodation. In addition, Lifeline staff will contact each tenant Monday to Friday and visit regularly. This will include, monitoring the fire risks associated with each tenant in their own home and reporting to the relevant line manager to take the appropriate preventative measures. This could include the removal of equipment if a risk is identified, and the provision of additional fire detection and warning devices, such as, smoke/heat detectors linked to the fire alarm system in the habitable rooms, along with vibrating pillows, visual alarms, or additional fire protection features, if required.

## Appendix 1 Specific Fire Safety Arrangements

### 1 Fire Safety Measures

Each residential building comprising of two or more flats will have a number of fire safety measures installed. These will have been assessed as the most suitable for that particular building, as part of the fire risk assessment and can consist of a combination of the following:

#### 1.1 Fire Detection and Alarm Systems

Where appropriate, buildings will be fitted with automatic fire detection and alarm systems in line with current regulations, standards, and guidelines. Where these systems are in place, they will be periodically serviced and inspected by a competent service provider, in line with the relevant British Standard. The period between visits to undertake inspection and service will be based upon a risk assessment and manufacturer's guidance but the maximum period between visits will not exceed six months. All visits will be recorded in the site's fire logbook. The responsible person will ensure that regular weekly checks and testing of the alarm system are carried out on a local level in line with the manufacturer's instructions. All activations of the fire alarm will be recorded within the fire logbook – testing, maintenance, and false alarms.

We will also carry out regular fire evacuation practice sessions to ensure our tenants understand what is required. This may be a physical on-site staged evacuation or a desktop review. We will also arrange feedback sessions to understand any concerns raised from our tenants during those practice sessions.

#### 1.2 Emergency Escape Lighting

Emergency escape lighting is lighting that comes on when the power supply to the normal lighting provision fails. It provides illumination for the safety of people leaving a location or attempting to terminate a potentially dangerous process beforehand. Emergency lighting will be periodically serviced and inspected by a competent service provider in line with the relevant British Standard. The period between visits to undertake inspection and service will be based upon a risk assessment and manufacturer's guidance but the maximum period between visits will not exceed twelve months. All visits will be recorded in site's fire logbook. The responsible person will ensure that regular monthly checks and testing of the emergency lighting are carried out on a local level in line with manufacturer's instructions. Tests will be recorded in the fire logbook.

#### 1.3 Fire Fighting Equipment



The Fire Risk Assessment will determine what is suitable and sufficient fire-fighting equipment for all buildings we own and/or manage. In most cases this will include fire extinguishers and fire blankets (recommended for all kitchen areas).

The Responsible Person will ensure that any fire-fighting equipment is inspected annually by a competent person to ensure it remains in an operational condition and is kept in an easily accessible position. A record of these services will be recorded in the fire log.

In addition to an annual service, the Responsible Person will ensure that fire extinguishers are kept in good order and available for use at all times. This can be achieved by regular inspections by a nominated person and will include checking:

- That the tamper indicator is not broken - this is usually a plastic tag or disc to show the pin has not been removed or tampered with.
- That the pressure gauge needle is in the green area - if there is no pressure gauge, the extinguisher is discharged using an internal gas cartridge, therefore no check is required.
- The unit has no signs of corrosion, dents, damaged, discharge or deterioration.

Any issues found will be reported to the contracted service provider and entered in to the fire logbook.

*It must be emphasised that staff are not expected to put themselves at risk by fighting fire. However, if they have been given training in the use of extinguishers or are familiar with the operation of and appropriate use of extinguishers, small fires, no bigger than the size of a wastepaper basket, may be tackled. This must only be done after raising the alarm. It is imperative that, if staff feel themselves to be at risk, they leave the fire and make their escape.*

## 1.4 Fire and Flat Entrance Doors

Fire doors within communal areas, such as staircase and cross-corridor doors, and flat entrance doors opening onto communal areas of a residential building containing two or more flats will be checked and regularly maintained in working order.

The inspection frequency for these doors will be determined by risk as part of the fire risk assessment. Checks will ensure that fire doors are correctly installed, are of the right specification and maintained in working order, including an effective, working self-closing device.

Staff will carry out a formal programme of visual fire safety inspections, which include visual checks on communal area fire doors and report on any areas of concern relating to fire safety.

Further guidance on formal fire door inspection frequencies is outlined in the Fire Safety Regulations 2022, regulation 10, which states that all buildings over 11m will have an annual flat front door inspection with communal doors inspected quarterly. Although guidance has not yet been published for buildings under 11m, we are adopting the same inspection regime.

## 1.5 Passive Fire Protection

Passive fire protection (PFP) consists of products installed in a building to improve its fire safety rating. PFP keeps people safe and limits damage to a building's structure and its contents by restricting the spread of fire and smoke and shielding escape routes long enough for occupants to exit the building calmly and safely. PFP products include but are not restricted to:

- Fire protection to the structural frame of the building.
- Fire-resisting doors and fire door furniture.
- Fire shutters.
- Compartment walls and floors.
- Fire-resisting walls and partitions.
- Suspended ceilings.
- Fire-resisting glazing.
- Fire doors and hardware.
- Industrial fire shutters and curtains.
- Fire-fighting shafts and stairwells.
- Fire-resisting ductwork.
- Fire-resisting service ducts and shafts.

PFP can sometimes be damaged or even removed during building and maintenance works or the installation of cabling and ductwork. When commissioning contractors or when any in-house works are undertaken the Responsible Person for the residential building will ensure that PFP is maintained intact or suitably replaced or repaired with like for like materials to ensure the fire integrity is preserved.

## 1.6 Sprinklers and Smoke Control Systems

If sprinkler systems are installed in residential buildings, these will be tested and inspected annually by a competent person. Pumps will be fitted with a weekly self-check system and flow switches will be fitted with an auto check system that runs every quarter. All results of any inspections will be entered in the relevant building fire logbook.

Where smoke control systems are in place, these will be tested weekly to ensure that they are operating effectively, with a full system inspection and test carried out by a suitably qualified person at least annually.

## 1.7 Signage

Every new tenant within a residential building comprising of two or more flats will receive information regarding fire safety arrangements for that building. Regular newsletters and safety information will be available on our website. Social Media channels will also be utilised for general fire safety advice.

Where required, communal areas of residential buildings will have clearly displayed Fire Action notices providing instructions in both pictures and words to tenants of what to do in case of a fire in their flat, or a fire elsewhere in the building.

Signs denoting the fire escape route will be prominently displayed on each floor. The signs will be on a contrasting background, easily legible and readable in low level lighting conditions or when illuminated with a torch.

## 1.8 Tenant Fire Safety

As part of the sign-up process, new and existing tenants will be made aware of their own obligations to reduce the risk of fire within their homes and not create a fire risk, both within their home and in any communal areas that may affect the safety of others.

A detailed list of specific responsibilities is given at appendices 2 and 3. This will then be issued to tenants as part of their tenancy sign up process.

Tenants are responsible for ensuring that they:

- Do not create a fire hazard in their home, for example:
  - Storing flammable items on their balcony, in common areas or by blocking fire escape routes, including not storing, parking, or charging (however temporary) petrol and/or battery driven items, such as motorbikes and mobility scooters.
  - Not leaving candles lit and unattended.
  - Avoiding smoking in bed and dispose of cigarettes safely if smoking inside the home.
  - Leaving chip pans and items cooking unattended
  - Not smoking in communal areas, as this is prohibited.
  - Ensuring electronic devices are charged responsibly using a British Standard charger.
  - Not allowing stored items to build up within their home.
  - Not leaving domestic rubbish on communal landings.
  - Not placing large items or forcing large items into refuse chutes that may cause blockages and result in a fire hazard.
  - Not leaving large bulky items or rubbish in communal areas or outside, against the building. This is a breach of the tenancy agreement.
- Are aware of fire safety measures, including the evacuation plan for their building.
- Do not make any structural alterations to their flats.

All tenants will be briefed on fire safety measures specific to their new home at sign up. Tenants will be advised that they may be contacted by Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, who will offer a home safety check and urged to accept the offer, which is free of charge.

E-bikes and E-scooters use rechargeable Lithium-Ion batteries. When used correctly these are not dangerous, but it is important to be aware of fire safety advice relating to these vehicles and particularly the charging of them. All Tenants should see our [Guide to E-scooter and E-bike](#)

[safety](#) for advice on charging your vehicle safely as well as things to consider before your purchase an E-scooter or E-bike. Additional advice is also available in our [safety advice for electric mobility vehicles](#) webpage.

## 1.9 Managed Use of Communal Fire Escape Routes

We have adopted a policy of zero tolerance relating to the placing and storing of objects in fire escape routes and stairwells. This is to reduce the risk of fire breaking out in these areas and the potential for any fire to compromise fire escape routes, as well as creating obstructions and restricting access to the fire and rescue services.

In communal stairwells, corridors and communal cupboards, tenants will not be permitted to keep and/or store:

- Bicycles, prams, pushchairs, and mobility scooters.
- Combustible materials, such as paper, books.
- Plastic or fabric plants and flowers.
- Rubbish awaiting disposal.
- Furniture.
- Barbeques.
- Motorcycles, mowers and other gardening equipment containing petrol or other fuels.
- Plastic or timber sheds or lockers.
- Hazardous chemicals, gas containers, or flammable liquids in the communal area or storage cabinets, dedicated storerooms, or cupboards.
- DIY materials or tools.
- Electrical appliances, such as tumble dryers and washing machines.
- Toys and play furniture.
- Recyclable materials.
- Bedding, clothing and shoes.
- Curtains, including nets.
- Food or other organic matter.
- Items that present a hazard, such as panes of glass, fairy lights and decorations.
- Any other bulky items.

In addition, residents will not be allowed to charge mobility scooters, batteries, or other electrical equipment in escape routes. There is a separate guide relating to [Mobility Scooters](#). This is in line with our [Housing Management Policy](#).

Where items are found in escape routes and stairwells, we will give notice to tenants to remove these items. If ownership of items is unknown, a notice will be attached to the item. However, goods that present a significant fire risk will be removed immediately, without notice.

Failure to remove items will result in us removing them. They will be placed in storage for a period one month [in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1982]. Any

goods that are not reclaimed will be disposed of without compensation. The costs associated with removal, storage and disposal may be re-charged to the tenant concerned. If we are unable to identify the tenant concerned, we may recharge all tenants within the block. Appropriate legal action may be taken against any person who persistently breaches rules relating to the use of communal escape routes and stairwells.

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## Appendix 2 Fire safety information Specific for Purpose built blocks of flats

For all purpose-built blocks of flats a stay put a 'Stay Put' evacuation strategy will be implemented and this means you can remain in your property when there is a fire in another area of your building. This is because your apartment is designed with barriers such as compartmentation, fire walls and fire doors to prevent the fire from spreading across your development.

Unless the fire started in your apartment, it should remain unaffected for at least 60 minutes. During this time, the Fire and Rescue Service should be able to prevent further spread or help you safely out of the building should it be required.

Do I have to 'Stay Put'?

If you don't feel safe and wish to leave your property, no one can prevent you from doing this. But you must be aware that a fire in another part of the building may affect your normal escape route. The Fire and Rescue Service will require clear access to the fire as quickly as possible and additional people leaving the building may slow their response.

Who do I report a fire to

- You MUST dial 999 immediately.
- Please advise Darlington Borough Council as soon as you are made aware of a fire in the building (DO NOT do this before calling 999).
- Advise your insurance company after the fire has occurred if it has affected your property.

**What do I need to do?**

If you are not in an area directly affected by fire, you should remain in your apartment, close doors and windows and await further instructions from the emergency services.

### **What to do if there is a fire in YOUR property**

- DO NOT stay to fight the fire.
- If there are others in the property alert them and make your way out of the building.
- If it is safe to do so, close windows and internal doors, switch off your cooker or oven if it is on.
- Always close the front door of your property behind you, **leaving it unlocked** where possible.
- Call the Fire and Rescue Service by dialling 999 and providing your full address and apartment number.
- Wait outside, in a safe location away from the building, until instructed to return by the Fire and Rescue Service.
- Do not put yourself at risk or cause unnecessary delay

**What to do if you see or hear of a fire in ANOTHER part of your building**

- DO NOT LEAVE YOUR FLAT.
- Call the fire service by dialling 999.
- The building is designed to contain a fire in the apartment where it starts. This means it will typically be safe for you to stay in your own apartment if the fire is elsewhere in the building.
- You must leave IMMEDIATELY if smoke or heat affects your home, or if you are told to do so by the fire service.
- If you are in any doubt, get out

**If you are NOT in your property and become aware of a fire within another part of the building**

- Dial 999 immediately while making your way to safety using your nearest escape route.
- DO NOT use a lift.
- DO NOT stop to collect belongings or return to your property.
- DO NOT enter the building until the emergency services advise it is safe to do so.

## Appendix 3 Fire procedures specific for Sheltered and Extra Care Schemes

### Instructions to Tenants and Visitors

#### DISCOVERING A FIRE IN/NEAR YOUR FLAT

1. If the fire is in your flat or near vicinity LEAVE IMMEDIATELY.
2. If the front door is hot or there is smoke coming in do not open the door. Move into the lounge or bedroom, shutting the internal door/s and stay by an open window.
3. If possible and it is safe to do so, leave the flat and make your way to the nearest fire exit, leave the building, and meet at the fire assembly point.
4. DO NOT RETURN TO YOUR FLAT.
5. DO NOT RE-ENTER THE BUILDING (unless instructed by Fire Service).

#### WHEN IN YOUR FLAT AND YOU HEAR THE ALARM

1. You should 'STAY PUT' (remain in your flat on alert).
2. You must provide guidance and direction to any visitors in your flat in line with this policy.
3. Keep your front door closed but be ready to leave if instructed.
4. Await further instructions, either by the fire service, the duty staff or via the intercom system.

#### IF YOU ARE IN A COMMUNAL AREA

1. Make your way calmly to the nearest fire exit, leave the building and meet at the fire assembly point.
2. Take any able-bodied person with you
  - DO NOT USE THE LIFTS
  - DO NOT STOP TO COLLECT BELONGINGS
  - DO NOT RETURN TO YOUR FLAT
  - DO NOT RE-ENTER THE BUILDING UNLESS TOLD IT IS SAFE TO DO SO

#### IF YOU DISCOVER A FIRE IN THE COMMUNAL AREAS

1. **Leave the area of the fire immediately and proceed towards the Fire Assembly point via the nearest fire exit.**
2. Operate the nearest manual call point (break glass) when exiting the building or when safe to do so.
3. Only if possible and when safe to do so **dial 999**, giving them a full address/post code.

Darlington Borough Council's CCTV control Centre monitor the fire alarm systems. On any fire alarm activation, they will:

- Attempt to communicate with Scheme Manager via the intercom to try and establish the cause of the alarm activation.
- Contact the emergency services providing all information
- Instigate the appropriate actions





### **Assembly Points**

Fire Assembly points (FAP):

Safe areas for people to meet and are identified by signage like the example below  
(FAP) Locations by Building

- Dalkeith House – The Front Car Park
- Oban Court – The Front Car Park (Staff to Manage Access)
- Rosemary Court – The Rear Car Park
- Rockwell House – The Front Car Park or Garden Area
- Ted Fletcher Court – The Grassed Area of the Main Car Park
- Branksome Hall – The Grassed Area Near the Main Front Car Park
- Linden Court – The Front Car Park
- Dinsdale Court – The Car Park of Dinsdale Close Flats
- Roxby Court – The Pavement next to The Bungalows
- Windsor Court – The Front Car Park or Garden Area

## Appendix 4 General fire safety information

### Fire door safety

Your front door/entrance door is a self-closing fire door that will prevent smoke and fire entering and leaving your property in an emergency. It is important that you DO NOT make any alterations to the door, such as removing the self-closing device, as this will compromise the fire safety of your development.

The new regulations require us to check your flat front door at least once per year. We will visit your property to gain access. Where we don't gain access, we will leave a calling card to advise we have called.

We will advertise the date of the next visit via letter.

During the visit, a QR code (sticker) will be placed on the top of your door on the hinge side. This sticker is unique to your flat front door and will be used to record inspection history. The QR code must not be removed.

Flat front door – Five-point safety checks:

For your safety we ask that you take time to check your fire doors using the five steps below.

- Door and frame – The door and frame will be checked to ensure that both are undamaged for example, no open holes or breaks exist in surfaces of either the door or frame.
- Door seals – Are there smoke and/or intumescent seals in place around the door or frame? Are these intact with no sign of damage?
- Hinges, handles and latches – Are hinges, handles and latches fixed firmly to the door and frame? Are these operating correctly, not loose or broken? Are there minimum of 3 hinges on each door and no missing screws?
- Door closing correctly in frame – Check the door closer for obvious signs of damage or missing parts. Check the door closes properly into the frame by opening the door halfway and letting it close. Does it close flush into the frame without sticking on the floor, frame, or latch?
- Gaps – When the door is closed in the frame, are the gaps less than 4mm between the door and frame on the top and sides of the door? (A £1 coin is about 3mm thick so use that as a gauge.) Are the gaps on the bottom of the door (threshold) less than 10mm between the bottom of the door and the floor? As a rule of thumb, if you can see light under the door, the gap is likely to be too big.

If during these checks you identify issues with the door, it is your responsibility to seek advice from a competent contractor to provide advice or undertake a repair. For further information visit: <https://www.firedoorsafetyweek.co.uk/toolkit/five-step-fire-door-check>

### Communal fire door

There are communal fire doors throughout your development, and we will inspect them to make sure they're in working order on a quarterly basis.

Fire doors are designed to stop the passage of smoke and fire when closed. They are often in place to protect escape routes so people can safely evacuate. You may find them across corridors, on stairwells, and on electrical cupboards.

It's important that fire doors, which are labelled with a blue sign, are NEVER wedged or propped open.

### Additional fire safety features

To protect you and your neighbours and enable the Fire and Rescue Services to safely tackle a fire, additional fire safety features may be installed in and around your property. These could include:

#### Fire signage

Fire signage will be located throughout the building. This may include:

- Fire exit signs indicate where the door to the final exit is.
- Directional fire signage is there for you to follow to reach your emergency exit.
- Fire action notices advise you what to do in the event of a fire.

#### Emergency lighting

These lights are provided on the escape route so in the event of an electrical failure, they will remain lit up and guide you to the staircase or exit.

#### Smoke ventilation

Smoke ventilation may be installed. This is commonly known as Automatic Opening Vents (AOVs). These vents open when smoke is detected nearby. The AOV is designed to open and clear smoke to allow for you to escape and for firefighters to safely fight a fire.

(Please note not all premises have additional safety features installed. Our competent Fire Risk Assessor reviews the safety features required in line with each building type and legislation.

Fire door  
keep locked

Automatic  
fire door  
keep clear

Fire door  
keep shut



Automatic  
smoke  
vent



## **Safety advice**

These fire prevention tips can help reduce the chances of a fire in your home.

### **Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms**

- All properties we own and/or manage will have hard wired smoke alarms/heat detectors installed.
- All properties we own and/or manage will have carbon monoxide alarms installed.

### **Test the smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in your property monthly.**

- In some developments, your smoke detector may be linked to the communal alarm system. If you think your fire alarm could be linked to the communal system, please check with your property/development manager before you test. In our sheltered schemes, for example testing your alarm may cause false alarms.
- If any of your smoke or carbon monoxide alarms have a one-year battery, make sure it is changed every year. Only take the battery out when you need to replace it.
- Never disconnect or take the batteries out of your alarm if it goes off by mistake.
- Mains-powered alarms are powered by your home power supply and have a back-up battery in case of a power cut. They need to be installed by a qualified electrician, and, like battery alarms, they do require testing.

### **In the kitchen**

Cook safely - Take extra care if you need to leave the kitchen whilst cooking, take pans off the heat or turn them down to avoid risk.

- Avoid cooking when under the influence of alcohol.
- Avoid leaving children in the kitchen alone when cooking on the hob. Keep matches and saucepan handles out of their reach to keep them safe.
- Keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob.
- Double check the cooker is off when you've finished cooking.

### **Deep Fat Frying**

- Take care when cooking with hot oil – it sets alight easily.
- Make sure food is dry before putting it in hot oil so it doesn't splash.
- If the oil starts to smoke – it's too hot. Turn off the heat and leave it to cool.
- Use a thermostat-controlled electric deep fat fryer. This means it can't overheat.

### **Electrics**

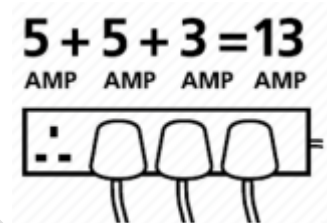
How to avoid electrical fires:

- Try and keep to one plug adaptor per socket.

- Keep your eyes peeled for signs of dangerous or loose wiring such as scorch marks, hot plugs and sockets, fuses that blow or circuit-breakers that trip for no obvious reasons, or flickering lights.
- Unplug appliances when you're not using them, they are fully charged, or when you go to bed.

Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order to prevent them triggering a fire.

An extension lead or adaptor will have a limit to how many amps it can take. Be careful not to overload your plugs to reduce the risk of a fire.



Appliances use different amounts of power – a television may use a 3amp plug and a vacuum cleaner a 5amp plug, for example. It's important to know the limit.

### Cigarettes

- Stub cigarettes out properly and dispose of them carefully. Put them out and make sure they are out!
- Don't leave a lit cigarette, cigar or pipe lying around. They can easily start a fire.
- Unplug e-cigarettes when fully charged and ensure you are using the correct charger type.

### Candles

- Make sure candles are secured in a proper holder and away from materials that may catch fire – like curtains or tissues.
- Put out candles when you leave the room, and make sure they're out completely at night.
- Consider using LED or battery-operated candles.
- Keep pets away from a lit candle.

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**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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**PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT & CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING**  
**OUTTURN 2024/25**

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

**Responsible Director -**  
**Dave Winstanley, Executive Director of Environment, Highways & Community Services**  
**Elizabeth Davison, Executive Director of Resources & Governance**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides:
  - (a) Information on delivery of the Council's Capital Programme, the financial outturn position as at 31 March 2025 and the proposed financing of the 2024/25 capital expenditure.
  - (b) An update on the current status of all construction projects currently being undertaken by the Council.
2. It also seeks approval for a number of changes to the programme.

**Summary**

3. Significant enhancements have been made to the Council's assets in three major programme areas of schools, housing and transport, mostly using external funding, as well as several other largescale schemes in the Borough. These investments are delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and more critically, to Council services. Refurbishment of council homes, improved learning environments in schools, better traffic flows and opportunities for sustainable travel have been achieved and are detailed within the report.
4. Capital expenditure in 2024/25 totalled £51.712m. Since the last revision of the Capital Medium Term Financial plan further refinements to estimates have occurred as part of the ongoing management of the programme and these are included in the recommendations below, all revisions can be contained within existing programmes.
5. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work. The current project position statement (PPS) shows there are 22 live projects currently being managed by the

Council with an overall project outturn value of £132.748m. The majority of projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

6. The projects are managed either by the Council's in-house management team, a Framework Partner or by consultants sourced via an open/OJEU tender process.

### **Recommendations**

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (a) Note the delivery and financial outturn of the 2024/25 Capital Programme.
  - (b) Note projected capital expenditure and resources.
  - (c) Approve the adjustments to resources as detailed in paragraph 25.

### **Reasons**

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
  - (a) The recommendations are supported to enable Members to note the progress of the 2024/25 Capital Programme and to allow the capital spend to be fully financed.
  - (b) To inform Cabinet of the current status of construction projects.
  - (c) To maintain effective management of resources.

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

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

### **Background Papers**

- (i) Capital Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28
- (ii) Project Position Statement March 2025

Brian Robson: Extension 6608  
Steve Wake: Extension 5424



Council Plan	The Capital Programme referred to in the report supports delivery of the Council plan.
Addressing inequalities	There are no specific implications for Addressing Inequalities.
Tackling Climate Change	Tackling Climate Change issues are assessed and reported in individual projects.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The recommendations support the effective and efficient use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to Health and Wellbeing which the report needs to address.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected.
Groups Affected	The proposals do not affect any particular groups within the community.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	The report does not represent a key decision.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
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

#### 2024/25 Capital Spend and Resources

### Information and Analysis

9. **Appendix 1** is for information and lists all live construction projects and provides details on numbers, type and details of the key individuals responsible for the delivery of the projects. It also provides a statement on the current status position on each project, details of actions being taken, where required and any current issues.
10. The Capital outturn for 2024/25 totalled £51.712m compared to £60.084m in 2023/24. **Appendix 2** analyses the 2024/25 capital spend by department, the proposed financing of the overall approved programme and corporate resources to be carried forward into 2025/26. The total of resources already approved to finance the outstanding capital

programme including part finished projects is £164.730m therefore £113.018m will be carried forward into 2025/26 to fund completion. The spend summary shows the amount available to be utilised in future years to help finance the capital programme.

11. **Appendix 3** summarises the total approved departmental capital budgets of £347.294m, along with spend to date of £234.277m and the projected outturn position which is lower than budget at £347.143m.
12. The proposed financing of the 2024/25 expenditure is:

	<b>2024/25</b>
<b>Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>£M</b>
<b>Financing of Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>51.712</b>
<i>Corporate resources</i>	
Corporate Unsupported Capital Expenditure (Borrowing)	8.410
Capital Receipts	3.145
<i>Externally funded</i>	
Capital Grants	12.177
Capital Contributions	0.437
<i>Departmental and Other Resources</i>	
HRA - Capital Receipts	2.663
HRA - Revenue Contribution	13.455
HRA - Borrowing	3.957
Departmental - Unsupported Borrowing	6.066
Departmental – Revenue Contribution	1.402
<b>Total Capital Financing</b>	<b>51.712</b>

### **Project Position Statement**

13. Project management procedures require the production by project managers of a Project Position Statement (PPS) for all projects over £75,000. This report brings together the pertinent data from the current PPS with financial information from the Financial Management System (FMS) and approvals by Cabinet.
14. The Project Position Statement (Appendix 1) details the current live construction projects, up to the end of March 2025, by delivery area, and provides details on numbers, type and details of the key individuals responsible for the delivery of the projects. It also provides a statement on the current status position on each project, details of actions being taken, where required and any current issues. The statement excludes any completed projects or those on hold.

15. The overview of live construction projects is as follows:

	Projects	Current Approved Budget  £ / p	Projected Outturn  £ / p	Variance  %	Variance (Value)  £ / p
Environment, Highways & Community Services	12	78,308,769	79,076,426	1.0	767,657
Resources & Governance	4	38,601,739	37,807,833	(2.1)	(793,906)
Economy & Public Protection	6	15,813,360	15,863,360	0.3	50,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>132,723,868</b>	<b>132,747,619</b>		<b>23,751</b>

16. The table shown above includes a column for current approved budget. In certain cases this budget figure may be different from the original approved budget. This could be as a result of variances identified during construction or other variables not known at the initiation stage. The original budget and all subsequent changes have been reported to and approved by Cabinet.

17. The live projects are at the following stages:

Department	Brief	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	Total
Environment, Highways & Community Services	0	0	1	4	2	5	12
Resources & Governance	0	0	1	3	0	0	4
Economy & Public Protection	0	0	1	5	0	0	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>22</b>

18. **Control Point 1 (CP1) – Start Up:** is used to define the position of a project at its conception stage.

- (a) **Control Point 2 (CP2) – Initiate:** defines a project at feasibility stage and will likely include a desktop assessment of a project and the use of informed estimates.
- (b) **Control Point 3 (CP3) – Define:** the point that the project is progressed to RIBA Stage F, i.e. detailed design.
- (c) **Control Point 4 (CP4) – Construction Phase:** is the stage at which work begins on the project, i.e. for a construction project on site through to build completion.
- (d) **Control Point 5 (CP5) – Evaluate:** is the stage post completion of the project at which time the project is reviewed and lessons learned are discussed in order that they can be taken to the next or similar projects.

19. The status on live projects is as follows:

Department	Red	Blue	Green
Environment, Highways & Community Services	2	10	0
Resources & Governance	0	2	2
Economy & Public Protection	0	6	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>

- (a) Star and triangle symbols are used to identify projects that have variances which are:
  - (i) More than £5,000, if the variance is also more than 5% of the approved budget for the project, or
  - (ii) More than £50,000 regardless of the percentage variance
- (b) Projects that are within these margins are symbolised with circles.
- (c) In addition to cost, the same symbols are used to indicate similar levels of variances in time and quality/outputs/outcomes.

20. Current projects with the red triangle symbol are as follows:

Project	Reason for Variance	Action
Skinnergate Re-development Housing	A number of delays have occurred on this project including the need to produce a revised design to satisfy concerns raised by English Heritage at the planning application stage and the requirements for Nutrient Neutrality.	Phase 1 demolition is now underway.
Hopetown Darlington	<p>Over the past twelve months, a range of outcomes regarding financial outturn have been presented, primarily due to remaining construction risks and disputes. These outcomes were expressed as a range, from a £605k under budget position to a £363k over budget position.</p> <p>With the project now substantially complete and final accounts submitted there is more clarity on the risk and additional costs.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the financial year 24/25, the project is presently £569k over budget after the final account had been submitted. However, this figure includes several items subject to dispute.</p> <p>Should the Council be successful in claims against the relevant parties, then project's budget deficit will be reduced to £124k. Conversely, if all aspects prove unsuccessful, the upper limit of the forecast projection will result in a budget deficit of £792,000. We will continue to report the high-end number in the PPS which represents an overspend of 2%.</p>	We are seeking legal advice on the areas of dispute.

#### Reconciliation of Project Position Statement to Capital Programme

21. The table shown below reconciles the differences between the Capital Programme (CP) and the Project Position Statement (PPS). Differences occur because the Project Position Statement includes all construction projects over £75,000 in value funded from Capital and

Revenue sources. Spending within the Capital Programme is not always of a construction nature, can be of any value and excludes Revenue funded schemes.

	Value £m
<b>Live Projects from Project Position</b>	<b>132.748</b>
Schemes closed or on hold within CP but awaiting PPS post project review.	13.411
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Housing Repairs & Maintenance	31.546
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Highways Maintenance	11.827
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Childrens Services School Maintenance	0.336
Non construction excluded from PPS	14.173
Capital Investment fund excluded from PPS	72.653
Projects under 75k excluded from PPS	1.957
Capital Schemes not yet integrated into PPS reporting	46.222
Included in PPS & CMR	0
Funding not yet allocated	22.270
<b>Capital Programme</b>	<b>347.143</b>

22. The table below shows the split of the approved capital programme of £347.294m, between the different service areas and also the various categories of spend. When compared to the table above it shows that there is a projected £0.151m underspend on the approved capital programme, however, it should be noted that most of this amount is made up of grant funding or borrowing.

	Construction				Non construction	Capital investment fund	Housing New Build - not yet allocated	Total
	Live Schemes 75k & Over	Annualised Schemes	Completed Schemes awaiting review	Live Schemes under 75k				
Area	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Housing	43.667	31.450	0.000	0.033	1.819	0.000	17.294	94.263
Economic Growth	49.579	0.080	0.440	0.240	7.738	61.279	3.476	122.832
Highways/Transport	60.975	11.727	9.799	1.118	2.193	7.325	1.512	94.649
Leisure & Culture	22.025	0.125	2.545	0.310	0.000	3.974	0.000	28.979
Education	2.867	0.336	0.000	0.164	0.079	1.124	0.000	4.570
Adult Social Care	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.071
Other	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.930	0.000	0.000	1.930
<b>Total</b>	<b>179.113</b>	<b>43.718</b>	<b>12.784</b>	<b>1.865</b>	<b>13.830</b>	<b>73.702</b>	<b>22.282</b>	<b>347.294</b>

### Capital Programme

23. The following major areas of work have been undertaken in 2024/25:

- (a) Children, Families and Learning
  - (i) £184,334 of Childcare Expansion Capital Grants were issued to six settings to help increase the number of childcare places.
- (b) Housing

- (i) Adaptations – Various minor adaptations were carried out to 157 properties across various areas.
- (ii) Heating Replacement - The upgrade of heating systems including 'A' rated Combi boilers, and air source heat pumps radiators and heating controls and the progressing of Electric to gas central heating replacement programme including the installation of new gas services and pipelines. Work was carried out to 193 properties.
- (iii) Structural Repairs – Ongoing structural monitoring continues and as a result, the balustrades were replaced to 3 blocks of flats in Whitby way along with the replacement of 12 balustrades to flats in the Bank Top area. We also commissioned a comprehensive structural survey of the walls on the North Road estate.
- (iv) Repairs before Painting – 232 properties had joinery repair works carried out as part of the cyclical external painting programme, which included 1098 properties (522 Houses, 318 flats, 3 schemes) in North Road, Firthmoor, Eastbourne and Northgate areas).
- (v) Roofing – Responsive replacements were carried out to 3 properties and flat roof replacement to 3 blocks of flats within various areas of Darlington, we also replaced the flat roofs to Dalkeith House. Planned Roofing replacement works, we carried out the replacement of roofs along with repointing works to 201 properties in the Haughton area during the year 2024/25
- (vi) Garages – No planned works carried out 24/25 due to delays, this work will be carried out in 25/26 to allow demolition of blocks to be completed.
- (vii) External Works –
  - (1) Various properties across the Borough have had fencing replacements works completed.
  - (2) 262 properties were identified by responsive inspections and required some fencing replacing.
- (viii) Pavement Crossings – Three properties had pavement crossings installed in their properties across the borough.
- (ix) Replacement Door Programme – 94 properties were identified by responsive inspections and required replacement doors. 240 fire doors were replaced to meet new fire regulation.
- (x) Communal Works & Door Entry Systems –
  - (1) Branksome Lodge – full renewal to new system and upgrade including connection to the cloud.

- (2) Branksome gate replaced with new bi-fold gate, the old sliding gate removed, with link to the cloud for access for this and the pedestrian gate.
    - (3) Seven sites have had new automation installed where old ones have been identified as intermittently faulty.
    - (4) Four sites have had new door entry upgrades.
  - (xi) Internal planned maintenance – 222 properties have been completed this year due to Labour constraints within Building Services.
  - (xii) Windows – We completed a programme to upgrade 172 properties to Double Glazing.
  - (xiii) Energy Efficiency works - Enabling work begun under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding Wave 2.1 (SHDFw2.1) stream. This will enable us to complete energy improvement works to 125 properties, which includes External Wall Insulation. We have also installed solar PV panels to 12 properties across the borough through additional grant funded projects.
- (c) Transport
- (i) Darlington Borough Council continues to deliver capital schemes as part of the action plans associated with the Darlington Transport Plan, Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy (2022 – 2030). The objectives of the Darlington Transport Plan, are to:
    - (1) Reduce transport's impact on the environment and support health and wellbeing.
    - (2) Improve safety for all road users.
    - (3) Connect people with job and training opportunities and link communities.
    - (4) Support a revitalised and transformed Darlington town centre and
    - (5) Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system.
  - (ii) Capital investment funding to progress and deliver DBC transport-related improvement schemes are funded through the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS), which consolidates funding from previous allocations of the Highways Maintenance Block, Pothole Fund, and Integrated Transport Block. CRSTS funding spent on delivering a programme of maintenance schemes and transport improvement schemes, including:
    - (1) Borough-wide patching and resurfacing schemes.



- (2) Resurfacing of A68 West Auckland Road (phase 1).
- (3) Resurfacing of B6280 Yarm Road (Hundens Lane Junction).
- (4) Resurfacing of Barmpton Lane.
- (5) Design of various safe routes to school schemes and the delivery of a scheme at Croft Road, Hurworth.
- (6) Implementation of dropped and raised kerbs to improve access for all.
- (7) Design and delivery of various road safety schemes throughout the borough including village gateways, speed indicator signs and a junction warning sign at Coatham Mundeville.
- (8) Maintenance and inspections of structures (bridges, retaining walls & culverts) throughout the borough.

24. Paragraph 25 shows the movements in the Capital Programme since the approval of the 2024/25 Capital MTFP, some of which have not yet been approved by Members.

25. Adjustment to resources requested by departments:

#### Virements

Department	Scheme	Value £	Reason for adjustment	Impact on budget
Economy & Public Protection	Towns Fund - Skinnergate & Yards Project (phase 2)	£150,000	Virement of Towns Funds	None
Economy & Public Protection	Towns Fund - Victoria Road	(£150,000)	Virement of Towns Funds	None
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£0</b>		

**Adjustments to note which have been prior released**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Value £</b>	<b>Reason for adjustment</b>	<b>Resource type adjusted</b>
Economy & Public Protection	Towns Fund - 156 Northgate	£800,000	Prior release of Towns Fund	Towns Fund
Economy & Public Protection	Former Wilko Site	£1,523,500	Prior release of Economic Growth Investment Fund (EGIF) funding for purchase of site	EGIF
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Railway Heritage Quarter	£52,000	Additional Historic England Funding on top of initial award of £200k	Historic England
Environment, Highways & Community Services	EV Charging Scheme Allington Way and Lingfield Way	£850,000	Prior release of departmental borrowing	Departmental Borrowing
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Restoration Works to the Replica Locomotive No.1	£150,000	Release of Indigenous Growth Fund (IGF) funding	IGF
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Markets Phase 3	£885,328	Release of IGF funding	IGF
People	Darlington College 14-16 Alternative Provision Centre	£2,600,000	Release of Higher Needs Capital Funding	Higher Needs Capital
People	Abbey School Modular Classroom Structure	£87,000	S106 - 15/00513 - 17/00398 Esh Salutation Rd LTD Education	S106
People	Abbey School Modular Classroom Structure	£180,245	S106 17/00818 Story Homes Land at Carmel Rd South Education	S106
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£7,128,073</b>		

**Adjustments needing approval release**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Value £</b>	<b>Reason for adjustment</b>	<b>Resource type adjusted</b>
Economy & Public Protection	Towns Fund - Edward Pease House 142 Northgate	(£8,000)	Adjustment to future Towns Fund Projects, in line with projected outturn for this scheme	Towns Fund
Economy & Public Protection	Towns Fund - Skinnergate & Yards Project (phase 2)	(£580,000)	Adjustment to future Towns Fund Projects, in line with projected outturn for this scheme	Towns Fund
People	Disabled Facilities Grant	£159,595	Increase in DFG funding for 2024/25 from Central Government	Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Installation of On Street Parking Machines	£287,000	Revenue Contribution (RCCO) 22/23 Contribution from Parking Processing and Appeals to support car parking infrastructure.	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Oak Tree Pub MSG - Walking & Cycling	£11,167	S106 - Oak Tree Pub MSG - Walking & Cycling - (26) 1501256FUL	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Lingfield Point	£2,000	S106 - Lingfield Point - Highways - (4) 0800638OUT	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Railway Heritage Quarter	£46,550	RCCO 23/24 Contribution from the Single Programme	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Roundhill Road	£36,913	Hurworth Gdns 16/00886/OUT Sustainable Transport	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Roundhill Road	£102,411	Hurworth Gdns 16/00886/OUT Transport - Bus Services	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Roundhill Road	£182,000	S106 16/00886 Bellway homes Public Transport	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Neasham Road	£117,936	S106 20/00196 Neasham Road Joint Venture (JV) - Sustainable transport	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Neasham Road	£101,709	S106 20/00196 Neasham Road JV - Highways Contribution	S106

Department	Scheme	Value £	Reason for adjustment	Resource type adjusted
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Neasham Road	£205,919	S106 Neasham Rd JV 20/00196/FUL Transport - Highways A66 Roundabouts	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Blackwell Grange Footpath	£44,677	S106 - Blackwell Grange JV - 23/00782/FUL - Sustainable Transport Contribution	S106
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Speed Management & Road Safety	£16,191	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards Speed Management & Road Safety from Personalised Travel Plan Delivery	RCCO
Resources & Governance	Capitalised repairs	£114,000	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards Town Hall Block C Works	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Flood Prevention Works at Stonedale Crescent	£45,000	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards Flood Prevention Works at Stonedale Crescent	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Highways Maintenance at Lime Lane	£120,000	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards Highways Maintenance at Lime Lane	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Dolphin Centre M&E Phase 3	£50,000	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards Dolphin Centre Design Fees for Invest to Save - M&E Phase 3	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Restoration of Locomotion No1 Replica	£15,000	Funding from Beamish Museum	Contribution from Beamish Museum
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Restoration of Locomotion No1 Replica	£50,000	Additional funding, part of £1m reserve	Rail Heritage ring-fence reserve
Resources & Governance	Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund - Wave 2.1	£1,271,238	TVCA Funding for Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) - Wave 2.1	TVCA
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Railway Heritage Quarter	£73,000	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards RHQ to support Crossing Scheme	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Walking Cycling Route MSG Yarm Road Mill Lane	£74,261	S106 - Walking Cycling Route MSG Yarm Road Mill Lane (16/00396/OUT 18/00972)	S106
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£2,538,566</b>		

26. **Appendix 4** details the general fund capital receipts and corporate resources received and brought forward from previous years. These amount to £5.344m of which £3.145m has been utilised to finance capital expenditure as well as £0.182m of earmarked receipts to fund slippage, leaving a balance of £2.017m to carry forward into future years.

### **Conclusion**

27. The total capital spend incurred during 2024/25 was £51.712m. Overall a balanced programme has been achieved with a wide variety of capital improvements undertaken throughout the Borough during 2024/25.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

28. There has been no consultation in the preparation of this report.

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**Capital 2024-25 Spend Summary - Financing by Department**

Line		GF Corporate Resources £M	HRA Capital Receipts £M	HRA Corporate Resources £M	HRA Revenue Contribution £M	Departmental Borrowing £M	Revenue Contribution £M	Capital Contributions £M	Capital Grants £M	Total £M
	<b>Capital Expenditure</b>									
1	Resources & Governance	5.978	2.663	3.956	13.453	-	0.114	-	2.899	<b>29.064</b>
2	Economy & Public Protection	3.006	-	-	-	-	-	0.010	4.218	<b>7.234</b>
3	Environment, Highways & Community Services	2.497	-	-	0.002	5.889	1.288	0.427	3.054	<b>13.157</b>
4	People	0.073	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.007	<b>2.080</b>
5	<b>Department Total</b>	<b>11.555</b>	<b>2.663</b>	<b>3.956</b>	<b>13.455</b>	<b>5.889</b>	<b>1.402</b>	<b>0.437</b>	<b>12.177</b>	<b>51.535</b>
6	Prudential Borrowing - Leasable Assets (not budgeted)	-	-	-	-	0.178	-	-	-	<b>0.178</b>
7	<b>Total Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>11.555</b>	<b>2.663</b>	<b>3.956</b>	<b>13.455</b>	<b>6.066</b>	<b>1.402</b>	<b>0.437</b>	<b>12.177</b>	<b>51.712</b>
8	<b>Resources</b>									
9	Approved	49.677	2.991	3.956	15.702	21.206	4.989	1.584	59.041	<b>159.147</b>
10	Recommended additional approvals	0.050	0.000	-	-	-	0.752	1.161	3.443	<b>5.406</b>
11	Leasable Assets	-	-	-	-	0.178	-	-	-	<b>0.178</b>
	<b>Total Resources</b>	<b>49.727</b>	<b>2.991</b>	<b>3.956</b>	<b>15.702</b>	<b>21.383</b>	<b>5.741</b>	<b>2.745</b>	<b>62.484</b>	<b>164.730</b>
12	<b>Approved / (Unapproved) Resources C/F (Line 11 - 7)</b>	<b>38.172</b>	<b>0.328</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2.247</b>	<b>15.317</b>	<b>4.338</b>	<b>2.308</b>	<b>50.306</b>	<b>113.018</b>

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Capital Programme Summary								
	A	B	C	D		E	F	G
	Budget 2024/25	Spend as at 31/03/24	Resources Available 2024/25	Spend 2024/25		Expected Outturn	Variance	Resources c/fwd to 2025/26 (before para. 25 adj.) £M
Department	£M	£M	£M	£M		£M	£M	
			(A - B)				(E - A)	(C - D)
Resources & Governance	131.026	48.690	82.336	29.064		130.215	(0.811)	53.272
Economy & Public Protection	29.597	12.349	17.248	7.234		30.861	1.263	10.015
Environment, Highways & Community Services	180.100	120.542	59.558	13.157		179.560	(0.540)	(13.157)
People	6.571	1.161	5.410	2.080		6.507	(0.063)	3.329
Totals Excluding Leasable assets	347.294	182.742	164.553	51.535		347.143	(0.151)	53.460
Prudential Borrowing Leasable Assets	0.178	-	0.178	0.178		-		-
Total Capital Expenditure 2021/22	347.472	182.742	164.730	51.712		347.143	(0.151)	53.460

Total spend 234.277

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<b>General Fund Capital Receipts &amp; Corporate Resources</b>		
<b>Line No</b>	<b>Sites</b>	<b>2024/25 £M's</b>
1	Brought Forward from 2023/24	5.287
2	<b>Sales Completed</b> Land at Beck House 26 Forge Way	0.050 0.007
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5.344</b>

<b>Capital Receipt Analysis</b>		
3	Brought Forward from 2023/24	5.287
4	Receipts received in 2024/25	0.057
		<b>5.344</b>
5	Less receipts used to finance expenditure	(3.145)
6	Less earmarked receipts	(0.182)
7	<b>Capital Receipts carried forward to 2025/26</b>	<b>2.017</b>

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**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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## **REVENUE OUTTURN 2024/25**

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

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

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## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To present the 2024/25 revenue outturn position (subject to Audit), to allow Members to consider the results in light of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and also to consider the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn.

### **Summary**

2. This is the final revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2024/25. The year-end projection shows an overall improvement in the 2024/25 financial position of £0.264m. This is an £1.149m improvement on the 2025/26 MTFP projected opening balance.
3. Details of variances from the original budget along with changes since the quarter 3 (Q3) projected position are contained within the main report.
4. There are a number of carry forward requests detailed in paragraphs 17 – 19, which will assist with projected slippage and pressures in the coming year.

### **Recommendation**

5. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) The revenue outturn for 2024/25 be noted.
  - (b) The carry forward of resources referred to in paragraphs 17 - 19 be noted and approved.

## Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To continue effective management of resources.
- (b) To continue to deliver services to agreed levels.

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

## Background Papers

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

Brett Nielsen: Extension 5403

Council Plan	The Council's revenue budget contributes to all priorities outlined within the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	This report is providing an update on the revenue budget position therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
Tackling Climate Change	This report provides an update on the revenue budget position, which supports the council's responsibilities and ambitions to tackle climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report contains updated information regarding efficiency savings contained within the MTFP.
Health and Wellbeing	This report is providing an update on the revenue budget position 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 is the final revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2024/25 and provides the 2024/25 revenue outturn position as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.
8. Overall, the projected General Fund reserves position at the 31 March 2025 is £12.607m, an increase of £0.264m on the planned balances in the 2024-28 MTFP. This relates to £1.321m underspend in the Council's 2023/24 financial results, £0.777m projected departmental overspends in the 2024/25 financial year and a £0.280m decrease in corporate resources.

### Departmental Resources

9. Departmental resource projections are summarised in **Appendix 2** and detailed in **Appendices 2(a) to 2(e)**.
10. The **People Services** outturn position is an underspend of £0.187m, after carry forward requests of £0.653m. This is an improvement of £0.330m on the position reported at Q3. The main changes to the previously reported position are detailed below:
  - (a) **Children's Services** has overspent by £0.299m, a small improvement of £0.005m on the reported Q3 position. Changes since Q3 include the following:
    - (i) Adoption and Placements and Assessment and Care Planning has a combined overspend of £0.284m, a decline of £0.131m from the Q3 report. This increase is due to four high cost placements that were extended beyond the expected end date adding £0.607m to the overspend. This increased pressure was offset by a reduction of two independent foster care placements £0.068m, slippage in the recruitment of staff for the repurpose of Gilling Children's home £0.073m, lower growth in in-house Foster Care £0.168m, and by additional grant and staffing and running costs savings of £0.163m.
    - (ii) Disabled Children has overspent by £0.059m, an improvement from the Q3 report of £0.058m. This is due to a reduction of actual day care provision taken up by families and staffing and running costs savings across the service.
    - (iii) First Response & Early Help has underspent by £0.195m, an improvement of £0.077m from the Q3 reported position, due to a combination of staffing and running cost savings.
  - (b) **Development & Commissioning** has underspent by £0.303m after carry forward requests of £0.060m. This is an improvement of £0.086m on Q3, due to a reduction in demand led services of £0.051m, vacancies and running cost savings of £0.034m.
  - (c) **Education** has underspent by £0.290m after carry forwards requests of £0.101m, an improvement of £0.179m on the Q3 position. This improvement has come from:

- (i) Education Services an improvement of £0.055m mainly due to additional grant income and traded income.
- (ii) School Transport an improvement from Q3 of £0.124m, due to a reduction in routes for special out of borough and post 16 pupils, following the ending of placements.
- (d) **Adult Social Care and Health** outturn position is an overspend of £0.265m after carry forward requests of £0.492m, an improvement of £0.092m on Q3 reported position. Changes since Q3 include the following:
  - (i) External Purchase of Care has underspent by £0.096m after a carry forward request of £0.470m, a movement of £0.227m on the Q3 reported position made up as follows:
    - a) Direct payments and Domiciliary care packages have reduced by £0.276m due to movements in care activity.
    - b) Attrition across care packages (£0.154m) and delays in hospital discharges (£0.100m) has reduced expenditure.
    - c) Direct payment contingency reclaims have increased by £0.166m.
    - d) Additional income of £0.563m due to assessed contributions and Health funding.
    - e) Increased expenditure for short break stay packages (£0.490m) and additional Residential/Nursing placements (£0.077m).
  - (ii) Service Development & Integration has overspent by £0.384m a movement of £0.338m on the Q3 reported position. This movement is mainly from an increase in bad debt provision following an exercise to identify historic invoices which are unlikely to be paid due to the customer being deceased or the debt is uneconomical to pursue.
  - (iii) Savings in staffing, reduction in the use of agency workers, general supplies and services, across Adult Services have provided an additional savings on Q3 of £0.200m.
- 11. **Environment, Highways and Community Services** outturn position is an overspend of £0.337m after carry forward requests of £0.451m, an improvement of £0.514m on the reported position at Q3. The headline changes are detailed below:
  - (a) **Highways and Capital Projects** underspent by £0.023m after carry forward requests of £0.036m, an improvement of £0.418m from Q3. The main elements of this movement are broken down into:

- (i) Building Design and Capital Projects, saw a growth in their income generation over the last quarter of £0.202m, due to works carried out on schemes including the Towns Fund, allowing for cost recovery.
  - (ii) Concessionary Fares and Sustainable Transport, following the year end reconciliation process carried out by Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) on the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) scheme, concessionary fares spend reduced, along with savings in running costs across sustainable transport budgets gave an improvement of £0.062m on the Q3 report.
  - (iii) Highways and Highways DLO, additional income generation over the final quarter has pulled back the projected overspend giving an overall improvement of £0.117m from the previously reported position.
- (b) **Community Services** overspent by £0.020m after carry forward requests of £0.176m, an improvement of £0.398m from Q3. Movements since Q3 include:
- (i) Street Scene has improved by £0.188m over the last quarter as repair and servicing costs associated with the larger fleet vehicles were not needed and therefore were lower than anticipated, along with a general improvement in income levels which allowed for additional cost recovery.
  - (ii) Waste Management has seen a further improvement in the level of tonnages for both household waste and at the civic amenity site with an associated decrease in costs of £0.201m.
- (c) **Community Safety** underspent by £0.396m after carry forward requests of £0.095m, an improvement of £0.040m from the Q3 position.
- (i) Car Parking and Parking Enforcement underspent by a further £0.068m from Q3. Patronage at the Council's car parks remains strong and continues to perform better than levels projected as part of the MTFP. Increased enforcement action by the Community Enforcement Team has seen an increase in parking fines which have helped to improve adherence to parking regulations.
- (d) **Leisure and Cultural Services** overspent by £0.521m after carry forward requests of £0.144m, an improvement of £0.053m from the Q3 position. Movements since Q3 include:
- (i) Leisure overall has improved by £0.191m as the strong performance at Dolphin centre was maintained over the final quarter of the year, from both the leisure offer and secondary spend.
  - (ii) Hippodrome, savings in staffing and strong secondary spend increased the underspend by £0.075m over the Q3 reported position.
  - (iii) Libraries position improved by £0.044m as alternative funding was identified to support the increased security requirements at Crown Street.

- (iv) Hopetown Darlington, overspend increased by £0.275m on the Q3 reported position.
    - a) Hopetown has been an extremely complex project, one of the largest capital projects delivered by the Council with multiple partners contributing to deliver a world class visitor attraction. Hopetown opened slightly later than anticipated; with some of the key facilities, such as Experiment, the show field and the private siding being completed after opening. This has affected the programming and initial years performance against the targets originally set, which has impacted on forecasted income.
    - b) A series of actions have been implemented over quarter 4 to address income, costs and visitor number projections previously reported. They have taken time to implement over quarter 4 and whilst they are starting to make an impact, the pressure has increased by £0.275m from the previously reported projected position. Visitors are choosing to park in neighbouring residential streets which is impacting on projected income in the region of £0.210m, options are being developed to improve this position.
    - c) The main issue to address is numbers visiting the site as spend per visitor is close to what was anticipated. This has impacted on projected income of around £0.104m in retail, £0.089m in catering and £0.359m in admissions income for The Experiment and Wagon Woods, sponsorship and donations. The reputation of Hopetown is growing, and this is being ramped up with a significant amount of work planned to further develop the profile of Hopetown to build awareness and gain traction in the marketplace. Hopetown has received a significant number of awards since opening, and this is continuing to build the profile. This work will continue to establish the venue as a world class visitor destination as was the vision that Members all endorsed. More actions are planned over the coming months and there is continuous review and monitoring of the business plan with further changes planned to manage the overall costs of the site.
  - (e) **Corporate Landlord** has overspent by £0.257m, an increase of £0.397m from Q3. Pressures in utilities contributed to the increased cost, with gas expenditure worsening by £0.160m from unit price variations and issues with the Combined Heat and Power (CHP) unit at the Dolphin Centre resulted in electricity costs increasing by £0.190m over the final quarter of the year. This unit is currently being replaced as part of the ongoing project.
12. **Resources and Governance** overall budget outturn position is an overspend of £0.796m after carry forward requests of £0.055m. This is an improvement of £0.456m on the position reported at Q3. The main changes to the previously reported position are as follows:

- (a) **Resources** an underspend of £0.820m, an improvement of £0.376m from Q3. This is mainly due to, Financial Services having an improved position of £0.355m due to a reduction in external audit fees concerning the backstop arrangements, additional grant income, staff vacancies and running cost savings across all budgets.
  - (b) **Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications** has underspent by £0.171m after a carry forward request of £0.010m, an improvement of £0.079m on Q3. This is due to staffing and running costs savings across all the service areas.
  - (c) **Law and Governance** has overspent by £0.186m, after a carry forward request of £0.040m, an improvement of £0.239m on Q3. The majority of this improvement has arisen from lower than projected external legal costs of £0.301m for Children's and Adults services, both of which are demand led.
  - (d) The **Xentrall Services**, ICT budget has overspent by £0.286m, an increase of £0.147m on the Q3 position. This is due to replacement ICT equipment and increased prices for Infrastructure.
  - (e) **Housing & Revenues** has overspent by £1.341m, an increase of £0.118m on the Q3 position. This increase is a continuation of shortfalls in Housing Benefit subsidies linked to the increase in homelessness and the lack of suitable accommodation, which has been offset by reduced bank charges (£0.060m) additional Homeless grant (£0.200m) and other staffing and running costs across the division.
13. **Economy and Public Protection** is underspent by £0.178m after carry forward requests of £0.117m, a decline of £0.086m on the position reported at Q3 as detailed below:
- (a) Development Management met its income target, however bad debt associated with S106 agreements saw the projected underspend not materialise. Work to recover this outstanding debt continues into 2025/26.
  - (b) Place Strategy's underspend has increased by £0.040m from staff savings generated from alternative funding.
  - (c) Property Management and Estates overspent by £0.081m which are the Cabinet approved holding costs for the former Wilko property pending future development.
14. The School balances and allocations are shown in Appendix 2(f).

#### **Council Wide and Corporately Managed Resources**

15. The Council Wide and Corporately Managed Resources budgets have a projected outturn overspend of a £0.125m. This overspend is detailed as follows:
- (a) Financing Costs for the year have overspent by £0.324m due to interest rates remaining higher for longer than anticipated (£0.270m) due to the economic climate, to offset this the Council has reduced borrowing as far as possible to minimise exposure to higher rates. Investment returns are slightly lower than budgeted due to the ending of one of the property fund investments (£0.054m).

- (b) The Council received additional non budgeted income from the Government from the Levy Account Surplus in late March (£0.192m), which along with additional procurement savings from North East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO) rebates have offset the additional financing cost pressure.

### Carry Forward Requests

- 16. There are a number of new carry forward requests to 2025/26 amounting to £1.276m from departments as detailed below. These requests are categorised into three areas: slippage, assisting in achieving the council plan ambitions and budget pressures. Approval is requested to carry these amounts forward into the new financial year.
- 17. **Slippage** – There is £0.197m of slippage on planned projects across the Council in the following areas:
  - (a) £0.031m **Flood & Water Act** – The Council’s flood and water officer will use these funds to support schemes and projects in 2025/26. This will fund the Council’s contribution to ongoing drainage studies in partnership with Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency, to assess the risk of flooding in Darlington and identify any potential schemes that may need to be developed to manage that risk.
  - (b) £0.005m **Highways** – For Salters Lane North kerb relay, following slippage on the works due to delays associated with permits.
  - (c) £0.036m **Street Scene** – Slippage on various small schemes including installation of street furniture including the new solar benches and wheelchair accessible picnic tables, essential footpath works at South Park rose garden and essential bridge repairs at The Denes.
  - (d) £0.011m **Dolphin Centre** – Replacement pavement café furniture to replace damaged and leisure equipment that has been ordered but not yet delivered.
  - (e) £0.018m **Outdoor Events** – Purchase of merchandise for the Darlington 10k run funded from previous years participants and bollard repair within the Town Centre.
  - (f) £0.096m **Estates and Property Management** – To cover back dated service charges within Bishopsgate House.
- 18. **Assist in achieving the Council plan ambitions** - There is £0.449m of carry forwards identified as follows:
  - (a) £0.010m **Commissioning** – To contribute towards the setting up costs of the repurpose of Gilling Children’s home, to support the children’s sustainability programme delivery.
  - (b) £0.060m **Education** – To implement a three year pilot to use a Quality Assurance tool linked to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP’s), to support the quality of EHCPs and delivery of automated data analysis to inform and support decisions. The Local

Area SEND Inspection of Darlington in November 2024 identified improving the quality of EHCP's as an area for improvement, this tool will make a significant contribution to improving this inspection outcome for the local area and evidencing improvements made.

- (c) £0.041m **School Transport** – To provide the Easyroute planner for school transport routes for three years. This will allow for multi-mapping of a number of different pickup points as well as formulating the shortest route. With the increased precision the team can also use the system to challenge contractors bidding for work, when the route is based on price per mile, which will result in savings against the school transport budget.
- (d) £0.022m **Work Force Development** - To support the service to deliver a leadership development programme for Team Managers and to support our ongoing work in terms of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by funding specific training related to seldom-heard groups in Darlington as per the CQC framework.
- (e) £0.050m **Street Scene Trade Waste** – Following the introduction of recent regulations that require businesses to separate their waste streams, the Council have introduced trade recycling but are not able to offer food waste collections until 2026/27. This has resulted in some customers moving to new providers. The estimated reduction of income during transition of service in 2025/26 is £0.050m and this carry forward is requested while work is undertaken to address this fall in income and assess how businesses are managing their waste collections and how food waste has impacted income from other collections.
- (f) £0.020m **Street Scene** – To provide upfront funding for invest to save and income generation initiatives under development in 2025/26.
- (g) £0.070m **Community Safety** – Staff savings associated with one-off funding is requested to be carried forward to support enforcement and service priorities in 2025/26.
- (h) £0.025m **CCTV** – Contributions received in 2024/25 by external bodies is requested to be carried forward to support service delivery in 2025/26.
- (i) £0.015m **Dolphin Centre** – Installation of three additional cameras for improved security on key locations in the facility and purchase of Technogym Checkup equipment for improved customer experience.
- (j) £0.100m **Dolphin Centre** – Upfront savings made in staffing in 2024/25 are requested to be carried forward to contribute towards the MTFP saving target for 2025/26 as spend to save schemes are developed.
- (k) 0.005m **Health & Safety** – To provide additional training for new team members to ensure the Council continues to provide excellent health & safety advice for all projects.
- (l) £0.010m **Communication and Systems**– To support several activities including enhancing the provision of the benefits advice service, temporarily increasing capacity

to support the S&DR200 celebrations, and ensuring all of the content on the corporate website is promptly transferred to the updated web platform.

- (m) £0.09m **Economy** – Savings within the Business team are proposed to be rolled forward to deliver number of events, e.g. Jobs Fair, STEM events, UK Real Estate & Inward Investment Forum (UKREiIF) and some advertorial features, to promote economic activity within the borough.
- (n) £0.012m **Climate Change** – Due to a short-term vacancy during the year a small underspend was generated within the climate change team. It is requested that this underspend is carried forward to support the climate change aims of the Council.

19. **Pressures.** There are £0.630m of identified pressures as follows:

- (a) £0.050m **Voluntary Sector** – Additional pressures arising across the commissioned services from increased service demand or inflationary increases.
- (b) £0.470m **External Purchase of Care** – Following the introduction of increased national insurance rates for employers from April 2025 the Council has reviewed the impact of these changes on Darlington's care market and has agreed to increase the staffing element of our payments formula by 1.2%. This will apply to care providers on the Council's Adults residential and Home Care and Support frameworks.
- (c) £0.020m **Street Scene** – Due to a rise in damage to play areas from misuse and vandalism continuing to put a pressure on the service.
- (d) £0.030m **Street Scene** – The ongoing borough-wide tree survey has identified additional trees required to be surveyed which will result in a cost pressure in 2025/26.
- (e) £0.020m **Street Scene** – The service currently uses two quad bikes for various activities, including weedkilling and winter gritting. While the replacement of the equipment is reflected in the MTFP the replacement cost has grown significantly, and it is requested that the increase in price above the projected replacement cost is carried forward.
- (f) £0.040m **Complaints** – The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman introduced Statutory Complaints Handling Codes on 1 April 2024, requiring payments to complainants where the Council fails to comply. Since 2019/20 stage 2 complaints have risen annually, increasing by 50% to 2024/25, meaning this statutory function is no longer appropriately resourced. Carry forward is requested to provide additional temporary resource to assist with the completion of Stage 2 complaints, whilst determining future resourcing.

### **Housing Revenue Account**

20. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) projections are shown in **Appendix 3** with an overall balanced budget. There has been an improvement in the working balance of £1.584m from the Q3 projection which is due to:



- (a) Rental and Sundry Rents are higher than forecasted due to 2024/25 having an additional rent week which was not factored into the Q3 projection. This has increased income by £0.632m.
- (b) Service Charges and Charges for Services and Facilities show a net improvement of £0.019m. Additional service costs are offset by charges to tenants.
- (c) There was an additional £0.165m Wave 2.1 grant income received which was not included in Q3.
- (d) There has been an additional interest income £0.483m received across the year, this is due to interest rates remaining higher for longer than originally forecast.
- (e) The repairs and maintenance budget has increased by £0.551m due to additional repairs required across properties, inflationary increases in the cost of those repairs and additional charge from a supplier for works undertaken which had not been previously charged.
- (f) The capital financing costs have decreased by £0.811m which is due to lower financing costs from slippage in the capital programme, including the new build housing schemes.

## **Conclusion**

- 21. The Council's projected revenue reserves at the end of 2024/25 are £12.607m, an increase of £0.264m on the initial 2024-28 MTFP position. This increase in reserves includes a brought forward amount of £1.321m from 2023/24, £0.777m of departmental overspends and a net overspend of £0.280m in corporate resources.
- 22. The £12.607m of projected reserves, is an improvement of £1.149m on the initial estimated 2025/26 -2028/29 MTFP opening balance of £11.458m.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

- 23. No external consultation has been carried out in preparing this report.

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**REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2024/25****Projected General Fund Reserve at 31st March 2025**

	2024-28 MTFP (Feb 2024)
<b>Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) :-</b>	£000
MTFP Planned Opening Balance 01/04/2024	16,384
Approved net contribution from balances	(4,041)
<b>Planned Closing Balance 31/03/2025</b>	<b>12,343</b>
Increase in opening balance from 2023-24 results	1,321
Projected corporate underspends / (overspends) :-	
Council Wide	64
Financing Costs	(324)
Joint Venture - Investment Return	0
Contingencies	(83)
Contribution from general fund reserves to Housing Benefits	(155)
Unallocated grant income	218
<b>Projected General Fund Reserve (excluding Departmental)</b>	<b>at 13,384</b>
<b>31st March 2025</b>	
<b>Planned Balance at 31st March 2025</b>	<b>12,343</b>
<b>Improvement</b>	<b>1,041</b>

**Departmental projected year-end balances**

	Improvement / (decline) compared with 2024-28 MTFP £000
People Services	187
Environment, Highways & Community Services	(337)
Resources and Governance	(796)
Economy & Public Protection	178
Chief Executive	(9)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(777)</b>

**Summary Comparison with :-**

	2024-28 MTFP £000
Corporate Resources - increase in opening balance from 23/24 results	1,321
Corporate Resources - additional in-year Improvement/(Decline)	(280)
Departmental - Improvement / (Decline)	(777)
Improvement / (Decline) compared with MTFP	<b>264</b>
<b>Projected General Fund Reserve at 31st March 2025</b>	<b>12,607</b>

**GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2024/25**

	<b>Budget</b>				<b>Expenditure</b>		
	Original 2024/25	Approved Adjustments	Approved C/fwds	Amended Approved Budget	Projected Outturn	C/fwds to approve	Variance
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>Departmental Resources</b>							
People Services	84,432	1,237	(715)	84,954	84,114	653	(187)
Environment, Highways & Community Services	24,842	2,209	(1,393)	25,658	25,544	451	337
Resources and Governance	13,580	831	(302)	14,109	14,850	55	796
Chief Executive	302	14	(15)	301	310	0	9
Economy & Public Protection	1,675	420	(195)	1,900	1,605	117	(178)
<b>Total Departmental Resources</b>	<b>124,831</b>	<b>4,711</b>	<b>(2,620)</b>	<b>126,922</b>	<b>126,423</b>	<b>1,276</b>	<b>777</b>
<b>Corporate Resources</b>							
Council Wide	631	(452)	(200)	(21)	(85)	0	(64)
Financing Costs	3,547	0	0	3,547	3,871	0	324
Joint Venture - Investment Return	(1,517)	0	0	(1,517)	(1,517)	0	0
Unallocated grant income	0	0	0	0	(218)	0	(218)
<b>Contingencies Budget</b>							
Apprentice Levy	202	0	0	202	285	0	83
<b>Total Corporate Resources</b>	<b>2,863</b>	<b>(452)</b>	<b>(200)</b>	<b>2,211</b>	<b>2,336</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>127,694</b>	<b>4,259</b>	<b>(2,820)</b>	<b>129,133</b>	<b>128,759</b>	<b>1,276</b>	<b>902</b>
<b>Contributions To / (From) Reserves</b>							
Planned Contribution to General Fund Reserves (MTFP)	(6,283)	0	0	(6,283)	(6,283)	0	0
Departmental Brought Forwards from 2023/24	0	(4,104)	0	(4,104)	(4,104)	0	0
Already approved Carry Forwards	0	0	2,820	2,820	2,820	0	0
Contribution from general reserves to Housing Benefits	0	(155)	0	(155)	0	0	155
<b>General Fund Total</b>	<b>121,411</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>121,411</b>	<b>121,192</b>	<b>1,276</b>	<b>1,057</b>

**Note:** Appendix 1 shows an increase in reserves of £1.321m brought forward from 2023/24

**REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2024/25**

	<b>Budget</b>				<b>Expenditure</b>		<b>(Under)/ Over Spend £000</b>
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure £000	Total Projection £000	
<b><u>Council Wide</u></b>							
Corporate Running Costs	28	240	(200)	68	0	0	(68)
Procurement savings	(24)	0	0	(24)	(85)	(85)	(61)
Pay Award	627	(692)	0	(65)	0	0	65
<b>In Year Over/(Under) Spend</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>(452)</b>	<b>(200)</b>	<b>(21)</b>	<b>(85)</b>	<b>(85)</b>	<b>(64)</b>

## REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2024/25

	Budget				Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<b><u>People Services</u></b>								
<b>Executive Director - People</b>	178	(1)	0	177	208	0	208	31
<b><u>People Support Services</u></b>								
Transformation & Performance	793	116	0	909	734	0	734	(175)
Business Support	1,649	107	0	1,756	1,742	0	1,742	(14)
	<b>2,442</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,665</b>	<b>2,476</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,476</b>	<b>(189)</b>
<b><u>Children's Services</u></b>								
Children's Services Management & Other Services	1,114	10	0	1,124	1,275	0	1,275	151
Assessment Care Planning & LAC	4,429	84	0	4,513	5,006	0	5,006	493
First Response & Early Help	3,758	(234)	0	3,524	3,329	0	3,329	(195)
Youth Offending/ASB	307	(7)	0	300	300	0	300	0
Adoption & Placements	21,263	(42)	0	21,221	21,012	0	21,012	(209)
Disabled Children	1,372	112	0	1,484	1,543	0	1,543	59
Quality Assurance & Practice Improvement	138	(38)	0	100	100	0	100	0
	<b>32,381</b>	<b>(115)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32,266</b>	<b>32,565</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32,565</b>	<b>299</b>
<b><u>Development &amp; Commissioning</u></b>								
Commissioning	1,967	475	(225)	2,217	1,905	10	1,915	(302)
Voluntary Sector	293	0	0	293	242	50	292	(1)
	<b>2,260</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>(225)</b>	<b>2,510</b>	<b>2,147</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>2,207</b>	<b>(303)</b>
<b><u>Education</u></b>								
Education	702	67	(48)	721	486	60	546	(175)
Schools	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport Unit	3,111	27	0	3,138	2,982	41	3,023	(115)
	<b>3,813</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>(48)</b>	<b>3,859</b>	<b>3,468</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>3,569</b>	<b>(290)</b>
<b><u>Public Health</u></b>								
Public Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b><u>Adult Social Care &amp; Health</u></b>								
External Purchase of Care	35,886	390	(442)	35,834	35,268	470	35,738	(96)
Intake & Enablement	727	24	0	751	748	0	748	(3)
Older People Long Term Condition	1,832	13	0	1,845	1,849	0	1,849	4
Physical Disability Long Term Condition	14	0	0	14	7	0	7	(7)
Learning Disability Long Term Condition	2,253	29	0	2,282	2,250	0	2,250	(32)
Mental Health Long Term Condition	1,163	68	0	1,231	1,246	0	1,246	15
Service Development & Integration	1,068	(28)	0	1,040	1,424	0	1,424	384
Workforce Development	415	65	0	480	458	22	480	0
	<b>43,358</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>(442)</b>	<b>43,477</b>	<b>43,250</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>43,742</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>In Year Over/(Under) Spend</b>	<b>84,432</b>	<b>1,237</b>	<b>(715)</b>	<b>84,954</b>	<b>84,114</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>84,767</b>	<b>(187)</b>

## REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2024/25

	<i>Budget</i>				<i>Expenditure</i>			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Approved Budget £000	Expenditure £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<b><u>Environment, Highways &amp; Community Services</u></b>								
<b>Executive Director - Environment, Highways &amp; Community Services</b>	184	0	0	184	183	0	183	(1)
<b><u>Highways &amp; Capital Projects</u></b>								
AD - Highways & Capital Projects	111	(1)	0	110	109	0	109	(1)
Building Design Services	63	(3)	0	60	(18)	0	(18)	(78)
Capital Projects	374	65	(66)	373	249	0	249	(124)
Car Parking R&M	612	0	0	612	531	0	531	(81)
Concessionary Fares	2,247	50	(56)	2,241	2,526	0	2,526	285
Flood & Water Act	89	202	(202)	89	58	31	89	0
Highways	4,237	246	(172)	4,311	4,352	5	4,357	46
Highways - DLO	(437)	22	0	(415)	(388)	0	(388)	27
Investment & Funding	89	433	(405)	117	107	0	107	(10)
Sustainable Transport	96	95	(28)	163	76	0	76	(87)
	<b>7,481</b>	<b>1,109</b>	<b>(929)</b>	<b>7,661</b>	<b>7,602</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7,638</b>	<b>(23)</b>
<b><u>Community Services</u></b>								
AD - Environmental Services & Community Safety	99	(1)	0	98	98	0	98	0
Allotments	19	0	0	19	18	0	18	(1)
Building Cleaning - DLO	33	32	0	65	135	0	135	70
Cemeteries & Crematorium	(821)	7	0	(814)	(549)	0	(549)	265
Street Scene	6,282	257	(61)	6,478	6,111	176	6,287	(191)
Transport Unit - Fleet Management	57	1	0	58	61	0	61	3
Waste Management	4,109	8	0	4,117	4,016	0	4,016	(101)
Winter Maintenance	618	5	0	623	598	0	598	(25)
	<b>10,396</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>(61)</b>	<b>10,644</b>	<b>10,488</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>10,664</b>	<b>20</b>
<b><u>Community Safety</u></b>								
CCTV	284	5	0	289	267	25	292	3
Community Safety	781	119	(140)	760	615	70	685	(75)
Parking	(2,049)	33	0	(2,016)	(2,285)	0	(2,285)	(269)
Parking Enforcement	17	(34)	0	(17)	(89)	0	(89)	(72)
Stray Dogs	53	1	0	54	71	0	71	17
	<b>(914)</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>(140)</b>	<b>(930)</b>	<b>(1,421)</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>(1,326)</b>	<b>(396)</b>
<b><u>Leisure and Culture</u></b>								
Dolphin Centre	973	74	(12)	1,035	676	126	802	(233)
Eastbourne Complex	36	3	0	39	40	0	40	1
Hippodrome	222	100	(40)	282	167	0	167	(115)
Hopetown Darlington	369	41	0	410	1,285	0	1,285	875
Indoor Bowling Centre	19	12	(12)	19	16	0	16	(3)
Libraries	946	11	0	957	991	0	991	34
Move More	31	1	0	32	32	0	32	0
Outdoor Events	522	1	0	523	505	18	523	0
Community Catering	82	1	0	83	45	0	45	(38)
Culture and Heritage Fund	122	1	(7)	116	116	0	116	0
	<b>3,322</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>(71)</b>	<b>3,496</b>	<b>3,873</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>4,017</b>	<b>521</b>
<b><u>Building Services</u></b>								
Construction - DLO	(366)	9	0	(357)	(347)	0	(347)	10
Other - DLO	0	36	0	36	0	0	0	(36)
	<b>(366)</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(321)</b>	<b>(347)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(347)</b>	<b>(26)</b>
<b><u>Corporate Landlord</u></b>								
Corporate Landlord	4,534	377	(192)	4,719	4,976	0	4,976	257
<b><u>General Support Services</u></b>								
Works Property & Other	76	0	0	76	64	0	64	(12)
<b><u>Joint Levies &amp; Boards</u></b>								
Environment Agency Levy	129	0	0	129	126	0	126	(3)
<b>In Year Over/(Under) Spend</b>	<b>24,842</b>	<b>2,209</b>	<b>(1,393)</b>	<b>25,658</b>	<b>25,544</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>25,995</b>	<b>337</b>

**REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2024/25**

	<b>Budget</b>				<b>Expenditure</b>			<b>(Under)/ Over Spend £000</b>
	<b>Original Budget £000</b>	<b>Approved Adjustments £000</b>	<b>Approved C/fwds £000</b>	<b>Amended Approved Budget £000</b>	<b>Expenditure £000</b>	<b>C/fwds to approve £000</b>	<b>Total Projection £000</b>	
<b><u>Resources and Governance</u></b>								
<b>Executive Director - Resources and Governance</b>	136	(3)	0	133	132	0	132	(1)
<b><u>Resources</u></b>								
AD Resources	120	1	0	121	123	0	123	2
Financial Services	1,598	180	(65)	1,713	1,003	0	1,003	(710)
Financial Assessments & Protection	301	40	0	341	289	0	289	(52)
Xentrall (D&S Partnership)	1,968	231	0	2,199	2,197	0	2,197	(2)
Human Resources	680	63	(123)	620	563	0	563	(57)
Health & Safety	200	(29)	0	171	165	5	170	(1)
	<b>4,867</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>(188)</b>	<b>5,165</b>	<b>4,340</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4,345</b>	<b>(820)</b>
<b><u>Head of Strategy Performance &amp; Communications</u></b>								
Communications & Engagement	1,045	133	(48)	1,130	982	10	992	(138)
Systems	1,132	(17)	(66)	1,049	1,016	0	1,016	(33)
	<b>2,177</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>(114)</b>	<b>2,179</b>	<b>1,998</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2,008</b>	<b>(171)</b>
<b><u>Law &amp; Governance</u></b>								
AD Law & Governance	136	(1)	0	135	146	0	146	11
Complaints & FOI	330	(1)	0	329	292	40	332	3
Democratic Services	1,381	5	0	1,386	1,505	0	1,505	119
Registrars	(26)	6	0	(20)	(23)	0	(23)	(3)
Administration	550	46	0	596	636	0	636	40
Legal Services	1,768	4	0	1,772	1,720	0	1,720	(52)
Procurement	195	(16)	0	179	197	0	197	18
Coroners	321	0	0	321	371	0	371	50
	<b>4,655</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,698</b>	<b>4,844</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4,884</b>	<b>186</b>
<b><u>Xentrall Shared Services</u></b>								
ICT	811	3	0	814	1,100	0	1,100	286
	<b>811</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>286</b>
<b><u>Building Services</u></b>								
Maintenance - DLO	(684)	0	0	(684)	(709)	0	(709)	(25)
	<b>(684)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(684)</b>	<b>(709)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(709)</b>	<b>(25)</b>
<b><u>Housing &amp; Revenues</u></b>								
Local Taxation	473	0	0	473	189	0	189	(284)
Rent Rebates / Rent Allowances / Council Tax	(132)	0	0	(132)	1,744	0	1,744	1,876
Housing Benefits Administration	451	186	0	637	641	0	641	4
Customer Services	324	0	0	324	214	0	214	(110)
Homelessness	347	0	0	347	196	0	196	(151)
Service, Strategy & Regulation and General	155	0	0	155	161	0	161	6
	<b>1,618</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,804</b>	<b>3,145</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,145</b>	<b>1,341</b>
<b>In Year Over/(Under) Spend</b>	<b>13,580</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>(302)</b>	<b>14,109</b>	<b>14,850</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>14,905</b>	<b>796</b>



**REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2024/25**

	<b>Budget</b>				<b>Expenditure</b>			<b>(Under)/ Over Spend £000</b>
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Approved C/fwds £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure £000	C/fwds to approve £000	Total Projection £000	
<b>Chief Executive</b>								
Chief Executive	217	(1)	0	216	225	0	225	9
Darlington Partnership	85	15	(15)	85	85	0	85	0
<b>In Year Over/(Under) Spend</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>(15)</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Economy and Public Protection</b>								
AD - Economic Growth	154	(1)	0	153	148	0	148	(5)
Emergency Planning	105	0	0	105	92	0	92	(13)
Building Control	192	1	0	193	148	0	148	(45)
Consolidated Budgets	46	109	(5)	150	150	0	150	0
Development Management	52	1	0	53	64	0	64	11
Economy	259	56	(58)	257	259	9	268	11
Environmental Health	351	0	0	351	248	0	248	(103)
Place Strategy	603	93	(82)	614	539	12	551	(63)
Property Management & Estates	(487)	122	(50)	(415)	(430)	96	(334)	81
Private Sector Housing	112	29	0	141	107	0	107	(34)
General Licensing	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Taxi Licensing	28	9	0	37	43	0	43	6
Trading Standards	260	0	0	260	236	0	236	(24)
<b>In Year Over/(Under) Spend</b>	<b>1,675</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>(195)</b>	<b>1,900</b>	<b>1,605</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>1,722</b>	<b>(178)</b>

**BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2024/25**

<b>SCHOOLS PROJECTED BALANCES 2024/25</b>					
School Name	Opening Balance at 1st April 2024	Formula Budget Allocation*	Total Available	Closing Balance at 31st March 2025	Projected Closing Balance as proportion of Formula Budget Allocation
<b><u>Primary</u></b>	£000	£000	£000	£000	%
Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools	34	1,131	1,165	134	12%
Harrowgate Hill Primary	43	2,687	2,730	(39)	(1%)
Red Hall Primary	239	1,588	1,827	156	10%
Rise Carr College, Clifton House & Eldon House	305	2,005	2,310	244	12%
<b>Primary Total</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>7,411</b>	<b>8,032</b>	<b>495</b>	

\*Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools/Rise Carr College original budget. Actual allocation based on attendance.

**HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2024/25**

	<b>Budget</b>				
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Total Projection £000	(Under)/ Over Spend £000
<b><u>Housing Revenue Account</u></b>					
<b><u>Income</u></b>					
Rents Of Dwellings (Gross)	(23,640)	0	(23,640)	(23,561)	79
Sundry Rents (Including Garages & Shops)	(497)	0	(497)	(580)	(83)
Charges For Services & Facilities	(3,377)	11	(3,366)	(3,567)	(201)
Contribution towards expenditure	(887)	(205)	(1,092)	(1,496)	(404)
Interest Receivable	(6)	0	(6)	(933)	(927)
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(28,407)</b>	<b>(194)</b>	<b>(28,601)</b>	<b>(30,137)</b>	<b>(1,536)</b>
<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>					
Operational	4,859	205	5,064	5,523	459
Service Charges	3,377	(11)	3,366	3,548	182
Maintenance	6,179	0	6,179	6,984	805
Capital Financing Costs	3,911	0	3,911	3,101	(810)
Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay	13,455	0	13,455	13,455	0
Increase in Bad Debt Provision	250	0	250	128	(122)
In year contribution to/(from) balances	(3,624)	0	(3,624)	(2,602)	1,022
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>28,407</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>28,601</b>	<b>30,137</b>	<b>1,536</b>
<b>(Surplus)/Deficit</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>HRA Balances</b>	<b>£000</b>
Opening balance 01/04/2024	25,947
Contribution to/(from) balances	(2,602)
<b>Closing balance</b>	<b>23,345</b>

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**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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## **XENTRALL SHARED SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT**

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

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

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. To update Cabinet on the progress and performance of Xentrall Shared Services.

#### **Summary**

2. Xentrall Shared Services is a public sector partnership between Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC). Established in May 2008, Xentrall is now in its seventeenth year working jointly with both Councils supporting them in the delivery of their services.
3. The services delivered by the partnership are:
  - (a) Xentrall Design & Print (Printing Services, Design Services, Displays & Exhibitions)
  - (b) Xentrall Finance (Creditors, Debtors, Banking, Income, System Support & Development)
  - (c) Xentrall HR (Payroll, Pensions, Recruitment, System Support & Development)
  - (d) Xentrall ICT (Service Desk, End User Device Management, Platform, Applications, Architecture Strategy, Information Security)
4. The initial aim of Xentrall was to improve service performance and reduce the cost of the functions it delivers by £7.4m over the original ten-year period of the partnership. Xentrall surpassed this financial expectation by delivering £14m savings across the same period as reported to Members over previous years.

5. The quality and performance of services have also improved over the lifetime of the partnership through a range of past and continuing service improvements and developments.
6. This is a significant achievement for a public/public partnership and it compares very well to other private sector partnerships many of which have failed over the same period or been brought back in-house and for a variety of reasons.

### **Recommendations**

7. It is recommended that Cabinet note the report and acknowledge the continuing success of Xentrall over the sixteen years since it was formed.

### **Reasons**

8. The recommendation is supported allow Members to receive information about the progress of the partnership and acknowledge the continuing success of Xentrall and the savings it has achieved over the seventeen years since it was formed.

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

### **Background Papers**

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

Ian Coxon Extension 01642 527019

Council Plan	There are no issues relevant to the Council Plan in this report
Addressing inequalities	There are no inequalities issues in this report
Tackling Climate Change	There are no climate change issues in this report
Efficient and effective use of resources	The partnership has delivered significant savings for the Council and these are built into the approved medium-term financial plan
Health and Wellbeing	There are no health and wellbeing issues in this report
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder issues in this report
Wards Affected	The issues in this report apply to all wards
Groups Affected	No particular groups are affected by this report
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not propose changes to the budget or policy framework
Key Decision	The report does not require a key decision
Urgent Decision	The report does not require an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## **MAIN REPORT**

### **BACKGROUND**

9. Xentrall Shared Services is a public sector partnership between Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC). Established in May 2008, Xentrall is now in its seventeenth year working jointly with both Councils supporting them in the delivery of their services.
10. The services delivered by the partnership are:
  - (a) Xentrall Design & Print (Printing Services, Design Services, Displays & Exhibitions)
  - (b) Xentrall Finance (Creditors, Debtors, Banking, Income, System Support & Development)
  - (c) Xentrall HR (Payroll, Pensions, Recruitment, System Support & Development)
  - (d) Xentrall ICT (Service Desk, End User Device Management, Platform, Applications, Architecture Strategy, Information Security)
11. The initial aim of Xentrall was to improve service performance and reduce the cost of the functions it delivers by £7.4m over the original ten-year period of the partnership. Xentrall surpassed this financial expectation by delivering £14m savings across the same period as reported to Members over previous years.
12. The quality and performance of services have also improved over the lifetime of the partnership through a range of past and continuing service improvements and developments.
13. This is a significant achievement for a public/public partnership, and it compares very well to other private sector partnerships many of which have failed over the same period or been brought back in-house and for a variety of reasons.
14. In recognition of the on-going success of the partnership, in 2015 Members agreed to amend the original ten-year period into an on-going rolling agreement which continues to this day.
15. The partnership is governed by the Xentrall Executive Board, namely the Executive Director – Resources and Governance (DBC) and the Director of Finance, Transformation & Performance (SBC), and is managed by the Assistant Director (Xentrall Shared Services).

### **Employees And Staffing**

16. Xentrall has approximately 150 full time equivalent employees based in Darlington and Stockton. All Xentrall services continue to have low sickness levels and high levels of staff satisfaction. Workforce planning and development is an ongoing process to ensure all services have the capacity and skills to effectively manage the daily challenges of such critical services, together with planning future service improvements and developments.



17. The last year has seen the retirement in Jun-24 of Ian Miles, the previous Assistant Director (Xentrall Shared Services). Ian Coxon, an Assistant Director at SBC who previously worked alongside Ian Miles in forming and developing Xentrall in its first eight years (2008-2016), took on the role of managing Xentrall upon Ian Miles' retirement. A smooth transition took place between both Ian's and the Xentrall Management Team to ensure business continuity.

#### **Customers - Internal**

18. Wide-ranging customer satisfaction surveys have generally been undertaken in SBC and DBC every two years throughout the life of the partnership. These involve canvassing service users and managers across both Councils.
19. The main two-year customer survey was undertaken during 2023/24, resulting in a score of 3.9 out of 5. This is lower than Xentrall's all-time peak scores in 2020/21 during the pandemic (4.5 out of 5) but is still relatively high and consistent with previous results. Xentrall will continue to monitor customer satisfaction in both Councils in future surveys.
20. In addition, each of the Xentrall services seeks customer feedback and satisfaction levels as part of their daily service operations. This instant feedback drives more immediate low level operational service improvement responses on an ongoing basis.

#### **Customers - External**

21. Xentrall continues to enjoy successful ongoing contractual relationships with a number of external customers. We also explore new opportunities for external business as and when these arise, which is in-line with the partnership's objective of tactically growing the business.
22. This continues to form a significant part of the overall Xentrall financial model and thereby reduces the funding required from both Councils. Xentrall generated external annual income of over £1m during 2024/25.
23. Existing services to external customers include:
  - (a) All Xentrall services to Tees Valley Combined Authority
  - (b) Design & Print services to a range of ad hoc external customers
  - (c) Finance and HR/Payroll services to SBC maintained schools
  - (d) Finance and HR/Payroll services to academies across the North East
  - (e) Finance and HR/Payroll services to South Tees Development Corporation
  - (f) HR/Payroll services to North Yorkshire Citizens Advice & Law Centre
  - (g) HR/Payroll services to Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland schools
  - (h) HR/Payroll services to SBC Direct Payment Clients
  - (i) ICT and Finance services to Tees Active Leisure Ltd
  - (j) ICT services to Theatre Hullabaloo in Darlington
  - (k) ICT services to North East Purchasing Authority (NEPO)
  - (l) ICT services to Northumberland County Council

## **Finance and Value for Money**

24. Since the formation of the partnership in 2008, the financial situation in both Councils has changed significantly as a result of reductions in local government funding and more recently with high levels of inflation. Throughout, Xentrall has continued to support both Councils in achieving balance in their respective Medium Term Financial Plans. This has mainly been achieved through staff savings resulting from more efficient ways of working across all service areas, as well as cost reductions arising from partnership joint procurement. The additional pressure of inflation continues to be a concern, particularly at renewal points in contracts.
25. In 2024/25 Xentrall's core net budget is approximately £6.4m, funded jointly by DBC and SBC. In addition, Xentrall manages approximately £2.6m in shared ICT costs on behalf of DBC and SBC.
26. To accompany previous cost reduction exercises, all of the Xentrall services used to take part in national benchmarking schemes to ensure that service quality was not compromised and to confirm that a balanced approach was used to measure improvements and success. At that time these comparators confirmed the low cost of the services provided by Xentrall. As reported previously, during the pandemic these activities were paused and now post-pandemic the national programmes have ceased. In the absence of this comparator, Xentrall services continue to monitor service performance and remain alert to any new benchmarking programmes, should they arise.

## **Performance**

27. Xentrall uses a balanced scorecard approach to performance management. This incorporates performance indicators covering the four interconnecting perspectives of employees, customers, service efficiency and cost.
28. In 2024/25 all but one of the key performance indicators were at or above target. The one exception, a service efficiency indicator reflecting the timeliness of completing DBC's bank reconciliation, was recovered in time for the financial year end and is the subject to a range of ongoing improvements to ensure performance is within target in future.
29. Xentrall is also subject to various internal and external audit regimes which also confirm the good performance and governance of its services. 97% of the Xentrall control checks undertaken by the Council's Internal Audit team during the year have achieved a green assessment, those in exception are minor in nature and work is in progress to address them.
30. The Xentrall ICT service successfully maintained certification in both Information Security Management and Quality Management System ISO standards and also was re-certified for continued access to the Government's Public Services Network (PSN).
31. The Xentrall Finance and Xentrall HR services successfully maintained the BACS Accredited Bureau status following a full audit by Pay UK.

## DBC & SBC Achievements

32. Xentrall continues to be a critical element in the continued effective functioning of both Councils. This covers a range of vital recurring tasks and services plus providing critical support to organisation-wide and service-based projects in. A snapshot of some of the Xentrall activities and achievements over the last year is shown for each of our services in the following paragraphs.
33. Xentrall Design & Print highlights, the production of digital graphics, operational print, marketing, promotional, advertising and signage materials for:
  - (a) Stockton's new centralised offices and headquarters, Dunedin House
  - (b) Preparations for elections across both Councils (Local, Police Crime Commissioner, Tees Valley Mayor)
  - (c) Darlington Hippodrome Theatre
  - (d) Hopetown Darlington
  - (e) Stockton International Riverside Festival
  - (f) Stockton-on-Tees News, and One Darlington Partnership publications
  - (g) Darlington Jobs Fair and Apprentice Employment Day Stockton
  - (h) Learning & Skills
  - (i) Darlington Dolphin Centre and Leisure Services
  - (j) Development sites including Riverside Road in Stockton, the extension of Preston Hall and the former Northen Echo Building in Darlington
  - (k) Both Town Centre and Events Teams for Armed Forces Day, Darlington 10k, Grove Fest, Rhythm & Tunes, Love your local market, Proms in the Park, Stockton Sparkles and Darlington Christmas Light Switch On
  - (l) Stockton & Darlington Railway 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations
  - (m) A whole range of other regular and recurring high volume printing tasks such as adult social care surveys, council tax bills, rent statements, landlord statements, green garden waste packs, food dietary information stickers and the Print for Post service at Stockton etc
34. Xentrall Finance highlights:
  - (a) Processed and paid around 70,000 creditor invoices for DBC, SBC and Tees Valley Combined Authority

- (b) Over 11,000 sundry debtor invoices worth around £75 million issued
- (c) Over £1 billion in cash income transactions posted and reconciled
- (d) Procurement exercise for the SBC banking contract completed through NEPO
- (e) Contract awarded for SBC cash in transit incorporating collection of cash from the Council car parks
- (f) Expansion of Lingfield and Spark Academies, increasing Xentrall income
- (g) Successfully implementing system changes and reconciliations on Finance System
- (h) Improved procedures in creditors to remove paper records for invoice registering, reducing waste and saving on storage costs
- (i) Contract awarded for migration of on-premise Finance System to a cloud-hosted model
- (j) Implemented system improvements to the BACS processing system with plans in place to migrate to a cloud hosted system
- (k) Maintained our BACS Accredited Bureau status following a full audit by Pay UK

35. Xentrall HR highlights:

- (a) Successfully maintained service delivery across more than 145 individual payrolls, covering more than 15,000 employees
- (b) Implemented real-time taxation of benefits in kind through payroll, in preparation for the April 2027 mandate
- (c) Introduced branding on the self-service HR system portal, MyHR for both DBC and SBC
- (d) Enhanced the leavers process, enabling managers to submit leaver forms directly via MyHR, reducing administration for all
- (e) Successfully completed the first full calendar year of the Annual Leave module on MyHR for Darlington
- (f) Produced key reports for the Office for National Statistics and supported reporting for the School Workforce Census, Social Work England and Gender Pay Gap

- (g) Initiated digital document storage for employee records in Stockton via ResourceLink (already in use by Darlington) and began supporting Stockton with the migration of historic HR data.
- (h) Progressed towards monthly pension reporting with all providers, improving data quality and reducing the need for year-end files and leaver forms
- (i) Enhanced pension year-end processes to improve data accuracy, calculations and reduce manual work
- (j) Joined a procurement framework to maintain external income and participate in the tender process for one of our largest existing clients
- (k) Carried out a staff review to reorganise teams, increase senior leadership capacity, and enhancing service improvement capabilities

36. Xentrall ICT highlights:

- (a) Resolved over 29,000 user incidents and requests, with 94% resolved within target and a happy customer satisfaction rating of 97%
- (b) 77% of all user incidents and requests were logged via our self-service portal, which is available 24/7 and accessible across a range of corporate devices
- (c) Successfully retained Cabinet Office certification for the PSN (Public Services Network)
- (d) Took part in a pilot of the new Cyber Assessment Framework developed by the National Cyber Security Centre
- (e) Continued the ongoing programme of device refresh, with nearly 300 replacement laptops for SBC and almost 200 for DBC
- (f) Migrated all 5000 devices across DBC and SBC from Windows 10 to Windows 11
- (g) Completed 54 separate ICT-related projects including the launch of the new visitor attraction site at Hopetown, the new Stockton Council Chambers within Dunedin House and the refresh of Darlington's CRM "My Darlington+"
- (h) Implemented Microsoft Sentinel to give ICT greater visibility of potential suspicious activity across the Council's network as well as the ability to automate security tasks, increasing protection outside of normal working hours
- (i) Developed a Cyber Incident Response Plan with backup up by specialist 3rd party support to help mitigate the risk and impact of a cyber incident

- (j) Installed Microsoft Defender across all corporate servers, giving enhanced anti-virus and threat detection that enhances our security posture and will help reduce the risk of a cyber incident
- (k) Completed the refresh of the WAN (Wide Area Network) across SBC and DBC, with new faster and more reliable fibre connectivity delivered to the Darlington Town Hall, Dunedin House and the 80 remote or satellite sites
- (l) Refreshed the Netcall Call Centre solution, the vital point of contact for residents across both DBC and SBC

### **Looking Forward**

37. As can be seen from the above, Xentrall continues to perform very well and deliver developmental projects alongside its day-to-day services to both Councils and external customers.
38. Looking forward, activities will include:
- (a) Xentrall Design & Print will continue to support both Councils, working closely with their respective Communications Teams and other services to ensure they all receive the solutions they need. The service is looking to reduce the number of prints produced on the printer/copier fleet at both Councils by using alternative bulk printing methods.
  - (b) Xentrall Finance will continue to work with both Councils and have a number of projects planned or underway which include; implementing the migration of the main finance system and income management systems to a cloud-hosted solutions.
  - (c) Xentrall HR will continue to work with both Councils and external academy customers in the exploitation of the HR/Payroll system and the MyHR employee interface and app. Legislative changes will continue to be applied to the system in a timely manner, as will the application of any pay awards as and when agreed.
  - (d) Xentrall ICT will continue to support both Councils and external customers with information and technology solutions. The service is planning to implement further cyber security measures and planning further exploitation of the ICT service desk system to improve services to customers.
39. In addition to the above programme and as with previous years, the continual service improvement mentality within Xentrall will be applied to leverage any further service improvements and/or savings for both Councils where possible. Outside of this programme, Xentrall will continue to assess new business opportunities should these arise as this approach aligns with the Xentrall business model of tactically growing the business, which in turn helps to support both Council's Medium Term Financial Plans.

**CABINET**  
**8 JULY 2025**

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## **PROCUREMENT OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNER UPDATE**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member –**  
**Councillor Chris McEwan Deputy Leader and Economic Portfolio**  
**Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director –**  
**Trevor Watson, Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection**

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### **SUMMARY REPORT**

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

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the outcome of the procurement exercise to seek a development partner for the redevelopment of key town centre sites and seek Cabinet approval to appoint the preferred bidder as detailed in **Appendix 1** (a Part III document) to this report.

#### **Summary**

2. On 11 June 2024 Cabinet gave approval, in principle, to entering into an agreement with a private sector development partner to bring forward development on several town centre sites. Cabinet also requested that the details of the agreement, including the final list of town centre sites to be included, be presented to Cabinet at a future meeting for approval.
3. To select a development partner a robust procurement exercise has been undertaken and has concluded in the selection of a preferred partner. Details of the preferred partner, evaluation matrix and scoring assessment are detailed in Appendix 1 (a Part III document) to this report.
4. Should Cabinet approve the appointment of the development partner, both parties will then enter discussions to determine the detailed terms of a development agreement.
5. Once the discussions are concluded, the completed development agreement will be presented to Cabinet for approval at a future meeting, targeted in November 2025.

#### **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that: -
  - (a) Cabinet agrees the appointment of the preferred development partner to bring forward development on several town centre sites.

- (b) Cabinet agrees to receive the development agreement, including the final list of sites, for approval in November 2025. This is a target date and could be subject to change dependent upon the length of the discussion period.

### **Reasons**

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reason:

- (a) that appointment of the preferred developer will allow the council to proceed to the next stage in bringing forward key town centre sites for redevelopment.

**Trevor Watson**  
**Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection**

### **Background Papers**

11 June 2024 Cabinet Report entitled Wilkinson's building acquisition and procurement of development partner.

Sarah Wayman: 07500033967



Council Plan	<p><b>ECONOMY -</b> The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will directly support the economy, attract new jobs and skilled workforce both in construction and end uses.</p> <p><b>HOMES –</b> The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will provide new homes for current and future residents of a range and mix of tenures and house types.</p> <p><b>LIVING WELL –</b> The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will provide improved public realm areas.</p> <p><b>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE –</b> The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will provide new homes and opportunities working with the social outputs provided by a development partner.</p> <p><b>COMMUNITIES –</b> The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will regenerate town centre areas and breathe new life into some obsolete areas.</p> <p><b>LOCAL ENVIRONMENT –</b> The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will regenerate town centre areas, improve connections and public realm.</p>
Addressing inequalities	The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will provide opportunities for everyone to access good jobs, homes and social connections through sustainable development and inclusive management practices.
Tackling Climate Change	Climate Change and sustainability measures will be provided prior to any development, at a later stage in the process.

Efficient and effective use of resources	Although officer time will be required to negotiate and provide direction, the procurement of a development partner is an efficient method to bring forward town centre development at pace. It will also ensure that the management capacity to deliver the developments is in place.
Health and Wellbeing	The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will provide opportunities to improve health and wellbeing through thoughtful place making and social value outputs.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will have a regenerative effect and contribute to mitigation of crime and disorder issues.
Wards Affected	The proposed development sites are situated in Park East Ward and Northgate Ward
Groups Affected	No groups are affected by the contents of this report. The procurement of a development partner is the first stage in bringing forward town centre sites for redevelopment which will include a stakeholder consultation strategy.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	It 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

### Procurement Information and Analysis

8. On 11 June 2024 Cabinet agreed that approval, in principle, be given to entering into an agreement with a private sector development partner to bring forward development on several town centre sites. The details of the agreement and the final list of sites to be included, to be presented to Cabinet at a future meeting for approval.
9. The June 2024 report sets out in detail the rationale for proceeding with the procurement of a development partner and outlined the benefits and risks.
10. The benefits of entering into an agreement are summarised below:

- (a) The appointment of a development partner will allow the council to bring forward the key sites for large scale market facing redevelopment in line with the Town Centre Strategy and the Council Plan
  - (b) Redevelopment of the sites will promote economic growth through job creation and the delivery of broader regenerative benefits
  - (c) The development partner capacity and capability will ensure that the project is fully resourced with the correct expertise, and allow the council can benefit from risk transfer opportunities
  - (d) The appointment will enable the council to leverage the benefits arising from the expansion of the Darlington Economic Campus at Brunswick Street which is acting as a catalyst to stimulate investment and interest from businesses wishing to grow and relocate to Darlington.
11. In June 2024 an initial high level risk analysis was undertaken prior to entering the procurement process. The risks identified are summarised below:
- (a) The development of each site will likely occur in phases which will be dictated by outstanding land assembly and, in some cases, property acquisition. This will dictate the pace of development which will span years.
  - (b) Due to the development variables involved and the potential availability of funding sources the delivery timetable may fluctuate.
  - (c) The viability study carried out by Savills on behalf of the council concluded that total costs would exceed value of the redevelopment of these sites - there is a risk that the gap between cost and value is too great to bridge, and sites cannot be developed.
  - (d) The redevelopment of several car parks will require parking considerations.
12. Should Cabinet give approval to appoint the preferred bidder, during the discussion stage, a comprehensive risk analysis will be completed, together with the necessary mitigating actions, for consideration by Cabinet prior to entering into a development agreement.
13. The sites considered in the procurement process are shown at **Appendix 2**.

14. The procurement was carried out using the Pagabo Developer Led Framework, as this was deemed to be the most appropriate and complaint route to the market. The procurement process and proposed next steps, subject to Cabinet approval, are outlined in the table below:

Expression of Interest	Oct 2024 - Nov 2024
Further Competition	Dec 2024 – Feb 2025
Bid evaluation	June 2025
Preferred developer report to Procurement Board and Cabinet	July 2025
Appoint developer	Summer 2025
Discussions regarding development options and risk analysis	Summer / Autumn 2025
Details of the Development Agreement and the final list of sites to be included report to Cabinet	Autumn 2025 / Winter 2026 (November 2025 target)
DBC and preferred developer enter into Development Agreement (subject to Cabinet approval)	Autumn 2025 / Winter 2026 (November 2025 Target)

15. The outcome of the above procurement exercise and identification of the preferred bidder is detailed in Appendix 1 (a Part III document) to this report.
16. Should Cabinet give approval to the appointment of the preferred bidder, the council and the developer will enter a period of discussion to determine the details of a proposed development agreement. During this period all options will be considered including the necessary contractual break clauses to protect the council's position at each of the agreed development stages.
17. A key focus for the developer during the discussion period will be securing the necessary private and public sector funding to clearly evidence viability for each stage of development. The necessity to demonstrate development viability sits in the domain of the developer and will be a significant factor in determining if the council enters a development contract.
18. The details of the development agreement will be presented to Cabinet for approval prior to entering a contract.

### **Financial Implications**

19. The financial model and implications will be determined during contract discussions. Due to the potential viability gap, funding will be required from a variety of sources to be sought and determined during the process.
20. Professional fees for the external surveyor and legal team will be required to complete the contract discussions. Fees are estimated at £20,000, which will be funded from existing budgets.

### **Legal Implications**

21. The Council has instructed an external law firm to draft the development agreement.

### **Estates and Property Advice**

22. Comments are embedded in this report.

### **Procurement Advice**

23. A further competition has been carried out via the Pagabo Developer Led Framework.

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

24. Carbon impact and climate change implications and mitigations will be incorporated into any future development.

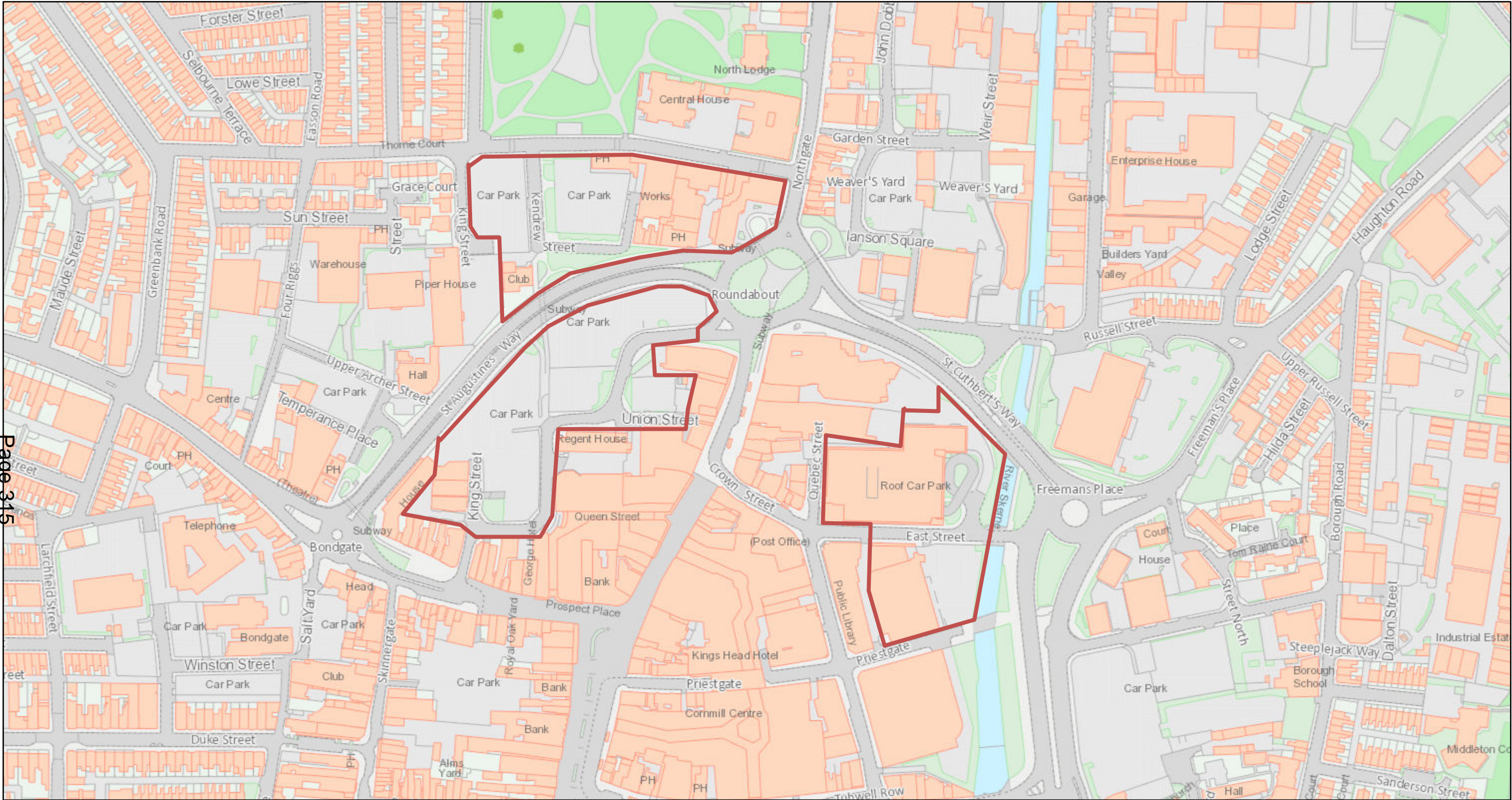
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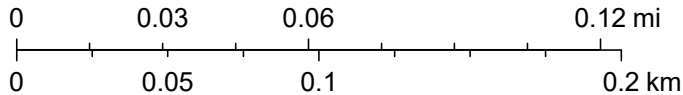
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