



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Adults Scrutiny Committee Agenda

9.30 am Tuesday, 28 October 2025

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington, DL1 5QT

Members of the Public are welcome to attend this Meeting.

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting (Pages 3 - 4)
2. Declarations of Interest
3. To approve the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 26 August 2025 (Pages 5 - 8)
4. Autism Strategy and Action Plan Update – Report of the Assistant Director – Adult Social Care. (Pages 9 - 24)
5. Adult Social Care Budget and Out-turn – Report of the Assistant Director – Adult Social Care. (Pages 25 - 32)
6. Work Programme 2025/26 – Report of the Assistant Director, Law and Governance. (Pages 33 - 46)
7. 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.
8. Questions

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

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Monday, 20 October 2025

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

Councillors Anderson, Crumbie, Donoghue, Layton, Mammolotti, M Nicholson, Renton, Storr, Tostevin and Vacancy

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact James McAllister (james.mcallister@darlington.gov.uk), Democratic Officer, Resources and Governance Group, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. Fridays

Briefing for scrutiny committees

Climate change can affect anyone, but some people have the potential to be more affected than others. How badly a person or group will be affected will depend not just on their exposure to the event, but on their social vulnerability – that is, how well they are able to cope with and respond to events like floods and heatwaves. People and communities experiencing multiple causes of vulnerability are the most extremely socially vulnerable.

Tackling climate change is a shared responsibility. It is deeply connected to other policy issues and local action is necessary for sustainable solutions. We need to be clear how any proposal/project impacts on our carbon emissions and how it affects our resilience. It is also important that the decisions we make do not prevent other people from reducing their own emissions or improving their own resilience.

Scrutiny has a critical role to play in these cross-cutting issues. Climate change as a stand-alone issue sits in the purview of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, but everything we do either has an impact on, or is impacted by, climate change so it is important for all scrutiny committees to also ensure that everything that comes in front of them has considered it.

The Council Plan now includes climate change as a key principle underpinning everything we do. The guidance notes for cabinet and decision papers have also been updated so the “carbon impact” box should never say no impact. Clearly, proposals or projects will differ, depending on what is being discussed, and not all of the questions below will apply to everything that comes to a scrutiny committee, but they should help to tease out how the officers have come to that decision.

Questions for scrutiny committee members to ask

1. Will the proposal/project result in an increase in carbon emissions?
 - How have you ensured that energy is not wasted or lost through poor insulation, heating the wrong areas or inefficient lighting?
 - Will there be an increase in business travel or commuting?
 - How easy will it be for people to travel by public transport, bicycle or walking?
 - Is there a need for travel at all?
 - Will there be an increase in waste disposal?
2. How will you reduce emissions?
 - How can you reduce energy use?
 - How can you reduce use of natural resources?
 - How can you ensure suppliers are working in a sustainable way?
 - How can you reduce waste?
 - How can you improve energy efficiency?
3. Will the proposal have any impacts on biodiversity (positive or negative)?
 - Will there be a net reduction in trees?
 - Are there opportunities for planting?
 - Are there other habitats or wildlife considerations?

4. Does the proposal incorporate/promote the development of renewable energy?
 - How can you increase the use of renewable energy in your project?
5. How can you minimise emissions from transport?
 - How can your project enable and encourage active travel?
 - How can you reduce the need for travel at all?
6. How will you make the proposal/project resilient to the impacts of climate change, such as more frequent severe weather, floods and heatwaves?
 - How can your project be designed to be resilient to these occurrences?
 - How can you ensure the building does not overheat in summer?
 - How will your service travel during these events?
 - How can communities using your service be protected?

Supplementary questions

- Does any procurement consider the impact on the environment?
- How does the project/proposal support the climate change strategy, tree and woodland strategy and sustainable communities strategy?
- How does the project/proposal support local businesses and employers to be sustainable?
- How can the project/proposal help develop local skills?

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26 August 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Anderson (Chair), Donoghue, Layton, Mammolotti, M Nicholson and Tostevin

APOLOGIES – Councillors Crumbie, Renton and Storr.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Joss Harbron (Assistant Director - Adult Social Care), James McAllister (Democratic Officer) and Sukhdev Dosanjh (Head of Commissioning and Contracts)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Toms.

AD7 INTRODUCTIONS/ATTENDANCE AT MEETING

AD8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AD9 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 10 JUNE 2025

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 10 June 2025, be approved as a correct record.

AD10 CQC ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK UPDATE

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, submitted a report (previously circulated) to update and inform Members on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance framework and inspection activity. Following an informal update on the inspection at the last meeting of this Scrutiny Committee, this served as a formal report on the findings of the inspection.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, first outlined the CQC's inspection process, detailing how this is the framework by which Local Authorities are assessed in accordance with the care act. The final report was received from the CQC on the 30th May 2025, with an overall score of 73%, which provided Darlington Borough Council with an official 'GOOD' score. The score was received alongside commentary from the inspecting officer and comments from key stakeholders.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, informed the Committee that the 73% score places the Council as one of the highest rated adult services in the country, a testament to the hard work, commitment and dedication of the adult service teams and wider colleagues who have worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care referred to the nine different quality statements by which the Council was assessed. The Council received 'good' in eight of the nine quality statements, with a Requires Improvement for Equity in Experience and Outcomes.

Members posed questions regarding the area which required improvement, specifically regarding whether this was something the team was expecting, to which The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, answered stating that this was something they were conscious of as other Local Authorities had received similar scores. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, affirmed to Members that the score was close to 'Good', but are actively trying to improve this.

Members also questioned regarding the 60-day turnaround for Occupational Health as to whether the team were agile enough to meet this time scale, to which The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, confirmed of the team's proven success in doing so.

Members concluded this area of discussion by congratulating the Adult Services team for their ongoing hard work, ability to respond to feedback, and fantastic result.

AD11 ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES COMMISSIONED FROM OUT OF AREA

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts introduced a report (previously circulated) which provided this Scrutiny Committee with an overview of current Out of Area (OOA) placements in residential, nursing or respite care. At the request of the Chair, this report also included reference to Day Opportunities and the reasons such placements have been made.

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts provided the Committee with the Association for Directors of Adult Social Services' (ADASS) definition of "Out of Area", and informed Members of the number of individuals placed outside the Darlington Borough. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts reminded Members that whilst such placements are OOA, 44% of these placements are within 0-20 miles of Darlington's Boundary, reinforcing Adult Services' ability to monitor individuals placed OOA.

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts went on to inform the Committee of the reasons for which the Council would secure placements OOA and provided an in-depth breakdown of what type of OOA establishments the Council utilises in both a short break and longer-term basis. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts also provided the Committee with further demographical context for those receiving care OOA.

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts asked the committee to note Key areas for Development in the context of OOA placements and therefore informed the Committee of such areas. Such areas included Day Opportunities, SEND Educational Providers, Skills for Life, health and Commissioning. It was also stated that Adult Social Services are to develop a local personalised learning college in Darlington for September 2026.

Members posed questions to The Head of Commissioning and Contracts regarding how Adult services ensure that Darlington residents placed OOA do not disrupt neighbouring local communities. Both The Head of Commissioning and Contracts and the Assistant Director, Adult Services, responded stating that the standard practice is to communicate with the Local Authorities that Darlington residents placed OOA are placed within, and receive continuous oversight over the care they receive.

AD12 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS END OF YEAR 2024/2025

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2024/2025.

The report referred to the performance of 10 of the 12 indicators reported at the end of the year 2024/2025, with one indicator showing performance has improved in comparison to the same period last year, two performance indicators being comparable with the same time last year, four performance indicators lower than the same time last year, and three indicators being not comparable and are reviewed at a point in time. Due to recent ASCOF /CLD (Client Level Data) changes there are two indicators that are no longer being reported on. The new indicators which are to be replaced are currently under development, and therefore figures were not able to be produced for this meeting of the Adults Scrutiny Committee.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, provided commentary over the aforementioned figures, and informed the Committee that the service area is currently facing significant demand as a result of people being discharged from hospital, placed temporarily in adult social care, and becoming permanent recipients as an eventuality. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, assured Members that the use of “permanent” here is not final, and individual cases are being reviewed constantly. Members were informed that the aim going forward is to encourage reablement and allow individuals to receive care from their homes.

Members posed questions on the KPI’s that weren’t performing as well as last year, specifically on Self Directive Support and how the Council can guide people into up taking this service. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, answered noting that Self Directive Support allows individuals to have ownership over their own care and thus have reviewed the direct payment procedure to ensure transparency with recipients over what the service is. Following this, the procedure has been adjusted to be much more transparent, and additionally it has become mandatory for all social workers to pose this as an option during consultations.

AD13 WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Assistant Director, Law and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited Members to consider the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

The Democratic Officer spoke to this report and invited Members and Officers into discussion over rescheduling certain items as a result of a previous item being deferred. The purpose of this was to ensure that items receive the appropriate time to be scrutinised effectively and successfully. As a result, Members and Officers agreed to move the Domestic Abuse Strategy (update) from the January Meeting of the Adults Scrutiny Committee to the October date, in order to allow the Medium Term Financial Plan item to receive sufficient time to be scrutinised in January.

AD14 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.

Following the Chairs request during the pre-briefing for this Scrutiny Committee meeting, The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, delivered an informal update on the Blue Badge Process as a result of its inclusion in the Forward Plan.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, alluded to the new Governmental Criteria for Blue Badges and how this has affected application volume and re-applications for existing Blue Badges. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, noted that the distribution of Blue Badges falls jointly between Adult Social Care and Customer Services, and that a new procedure has been put in place to combat the backlog of applications.

The new procedure ensures that the application processing has been spread across the Occupational Therapy Team, rather than falling to one member of staff. Additionally, there is now no requirement for a meeting with Occupational Therapy if one's condition automatically warrants a Blue Badge.

As a result of the new procedures and criteria, waiting times have been reduced from 16 weeks to 5 weeks (from the start to end of the process) and has hugely reduced the current number of individuals waiting for a Blue Badge.

Members welcomed this and commented on the huge relief this has provided to residents.

AD15 QUESTIONS

There were no further questions posed at this Meeting.

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 OCTOBER 2025

Autism Strategy and Action Plan Update

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on the development of Darlington's Autism Strategy, outline its key aims in line with the national strategy, report on progress to date, and describe how co-production is being used to shape the strategy.

Summary

2. Darlington is currently developing a local Autism Strategy that aligns with the national strategy "The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026." The local strategy aims to improve outcomes for autistic people across all ages by promoting inclusion, access to services, and understanding of autism within the community.
3. Key aims of the strategy include:
 - (a) Improving understanding and acceptance of autism.
 - (b) Enhancing access to education, employment, and health services.
 - (c) Reducing health inequalities and improving physical and mental health outcomes.
 - (d) Supporting autistic people to live independently and safely.
 - (e) Strengthening community inclusion and reducing isolation.
4. Progress to date includes:
 - (a) Establishment of a multi-agency Autism Strategy Working Group.
 - (b) Mapping of current services and identification of gaps.
 - (c) Engagement with autistic individuals, families, and carers through surveys and focus groups.
 - (d) Initial drafting of strategic priorities and action areas.
5. Co-production is central to the development of the strategy. We are working closely with autistic people, their families, carers, and professionals to ensure the strategy reflects lived experience and local needs. This includes:
 - (a) Facilitated workshops with autistic adults and young people.
 - (b) Collaboration with local autism support organisations.
 - (c) Inclusion of feedback from health, education, and social care professionals.

- (d) Ongoing opportunities for public input through consultation and digital platforms

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that: -

- (a) Members note the presentation from Inclusion North on the progress made in developing the Autism Strategy.
- (b) Members support continued co-production and engagement activities.
- (c) A further update be provided once the draft strategy is completed.

Joss Harbron
Assistant Director Adults Social Care

Background Papers

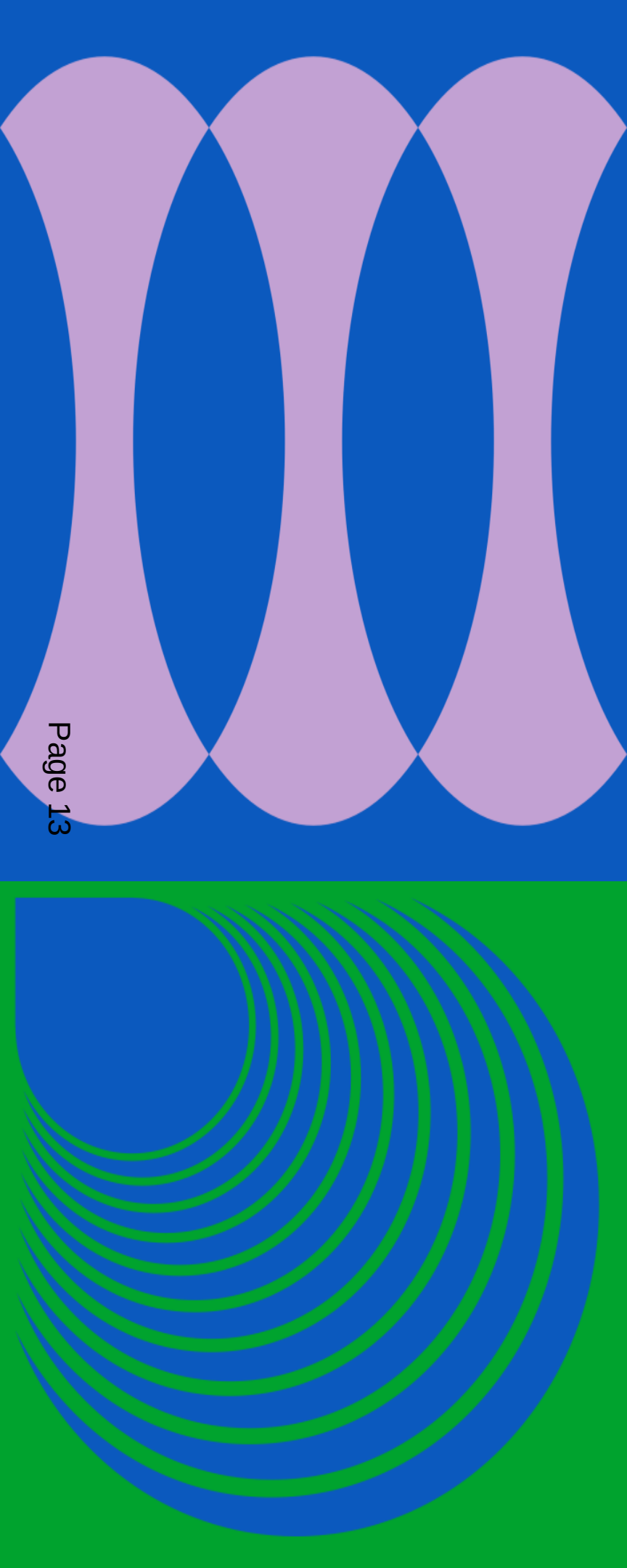
- a) The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults (2021–2026) - [National Strategy on GOV.UK](#)
- b) Darlington Council Plan (2024–2027) - [Council Plan PDF](#)
- c) Darlington Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2024–2028) - [Health and Wellbeing Strategy PDF](#)

Joss Harbron: 5278

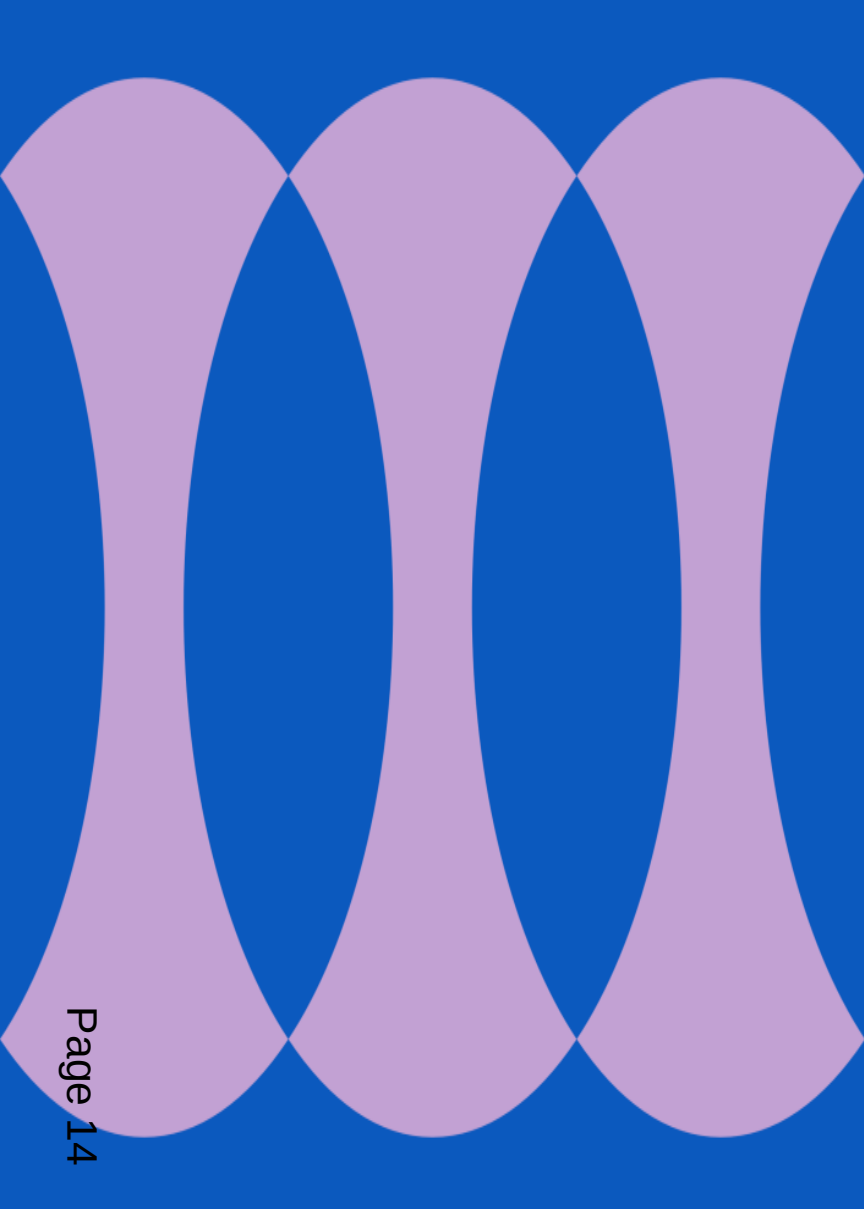
Council Plan	This supports the objectives of the Council Plan
Addressing inequalities	The development of the strategy and actions aim to address inequalities in relation to autistic people within Darlington
Tackling Climate Change	The strategy aims to promote independence across the borough.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The strategy aims to identify current support and work alongside local people and services to ensure that there is an efficient and effective use of resources
Health and Wellbeing	This strategy supports the health and wellbeing of autistic people
S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	Autistic People and Unpaid family carers
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No

Urgent Decision	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The strategy within this report aims to positively impact autistic looked after children and care leavers.

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Development of the Darlington Autism Strategy 2025-2026

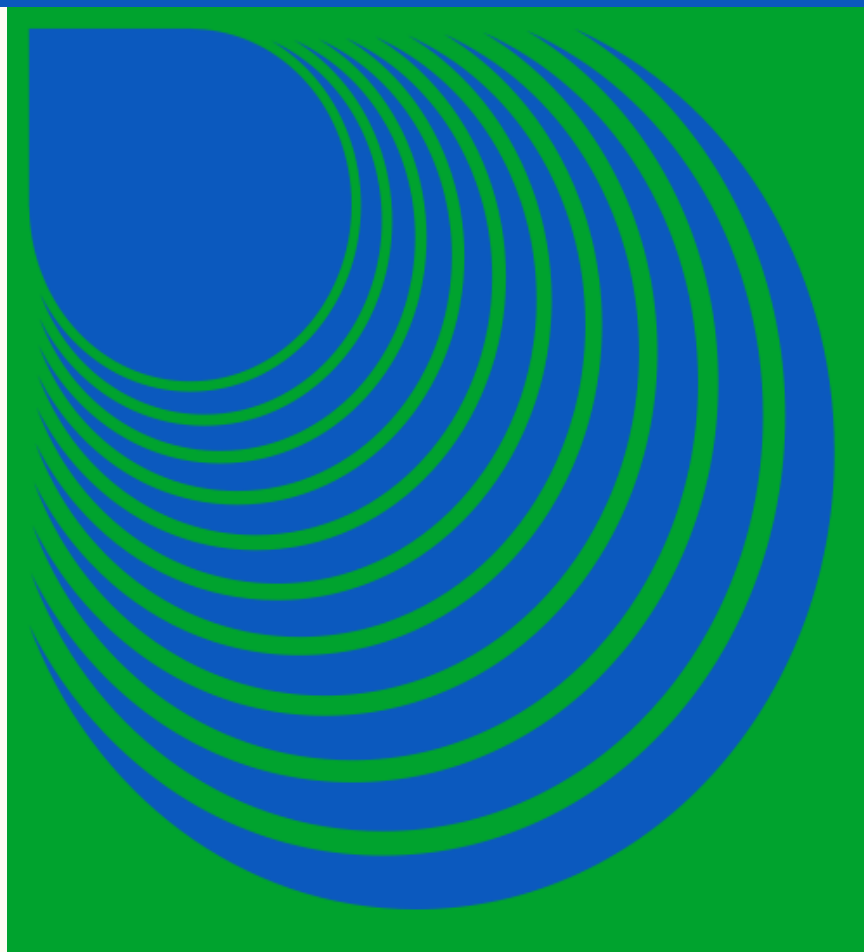


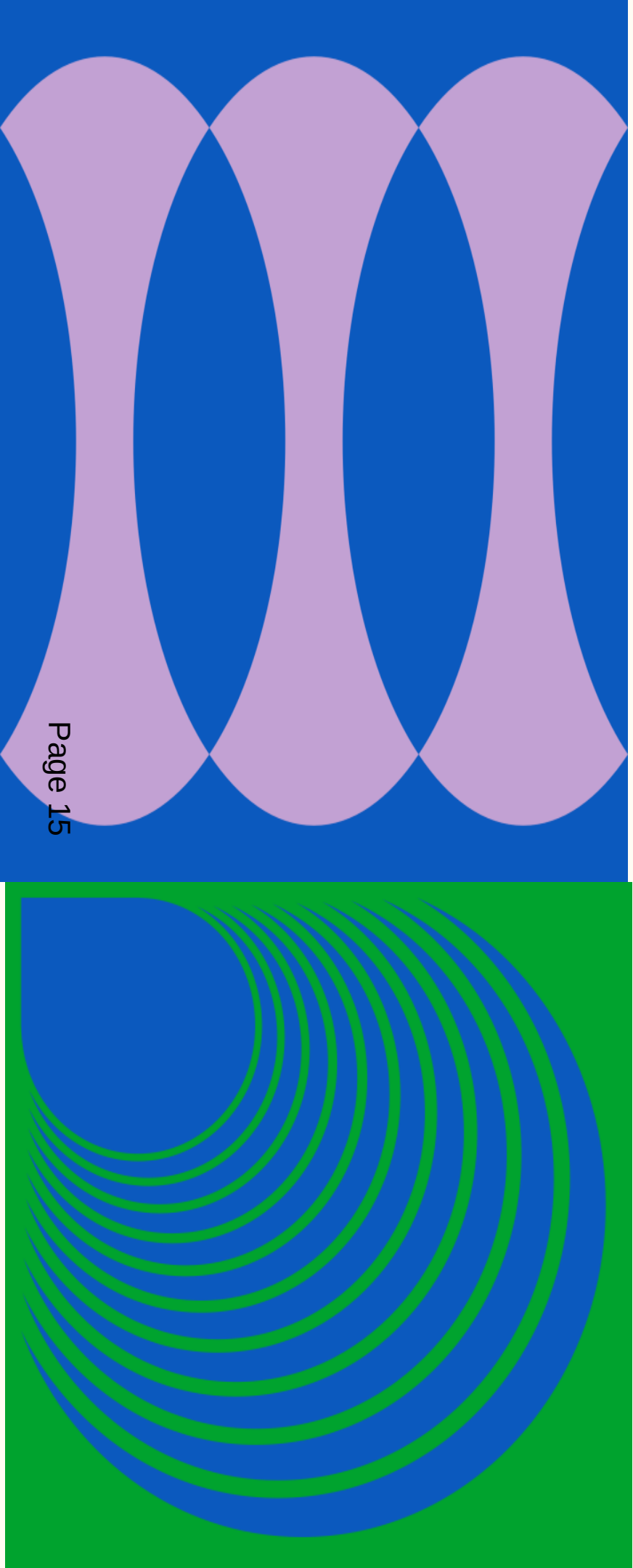
Objectives

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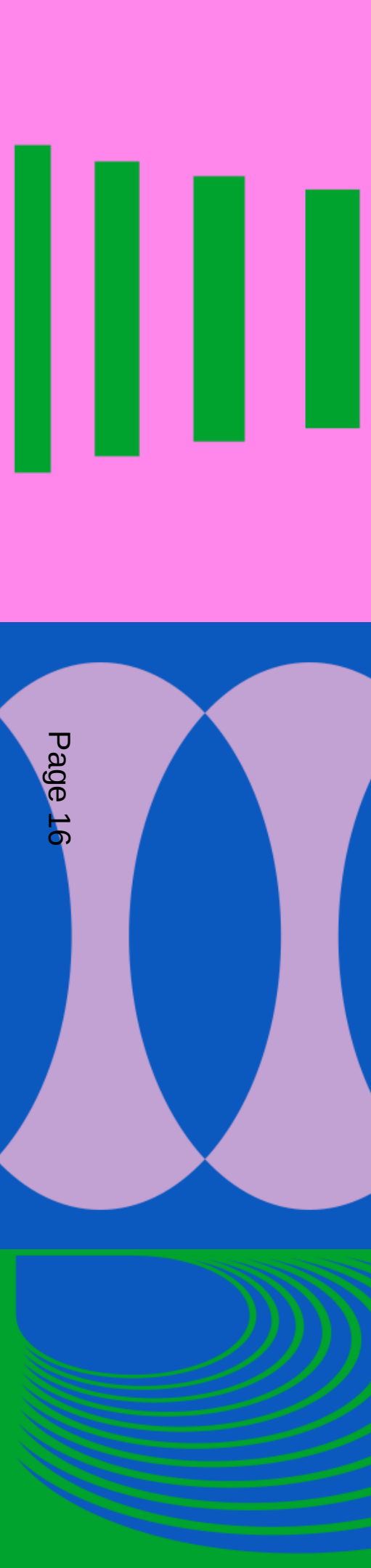
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 - Supporting autistic people to live independently and safely.
 - Strengthening community inclusion and reducing isolation.
- 



First Year Objectives

- Establishment of Darlington Steering Group to represent the community with purpose of developing an autism strategy
- Survey Darlington residents on key areas relating to autism.
- Review the feedback to inform the development of strategy.
- Draft strategy and consultation period.
- Finalise strategy
- Development of delivery plan.



Progress time-line

September Meeting: Continue to look at themes derived from survey results to inform the strategy.

November Meeting: Look at draft strategy & start to develop 1st year delivery plan.

January Meeting: Look at 1st year delivery plan.

January- March: Consultation period

*** March- April 2026** - Publish Autism Strategy & 1st Year Delivery plan.

Themes from survey feedback

Education

Employment

Involvement

Access to Support

Financial Support

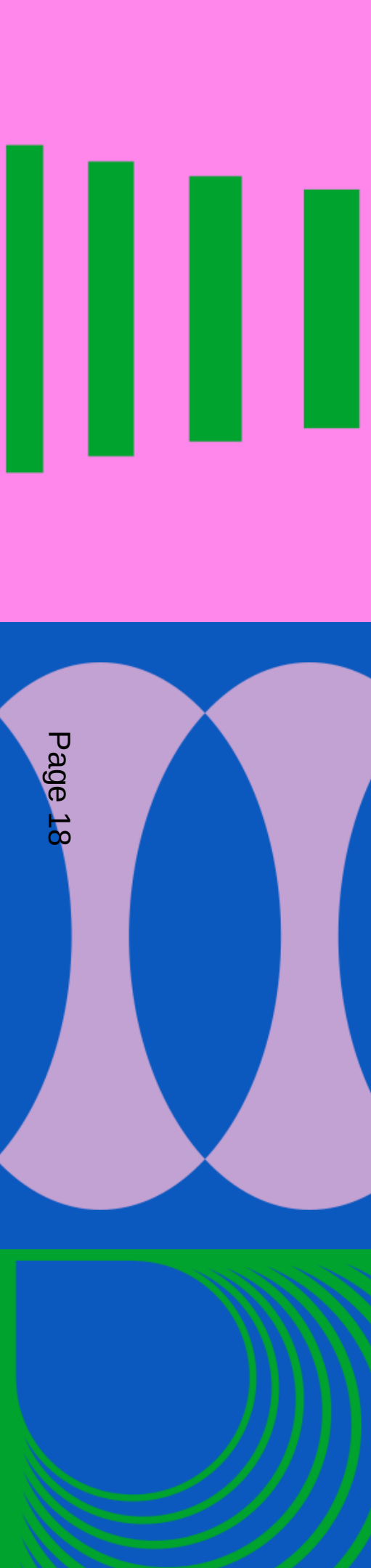
Sensory/ Quiet Spaces

Healthcare

Safety & Housing

Community & Belonging

Celebrating Autism



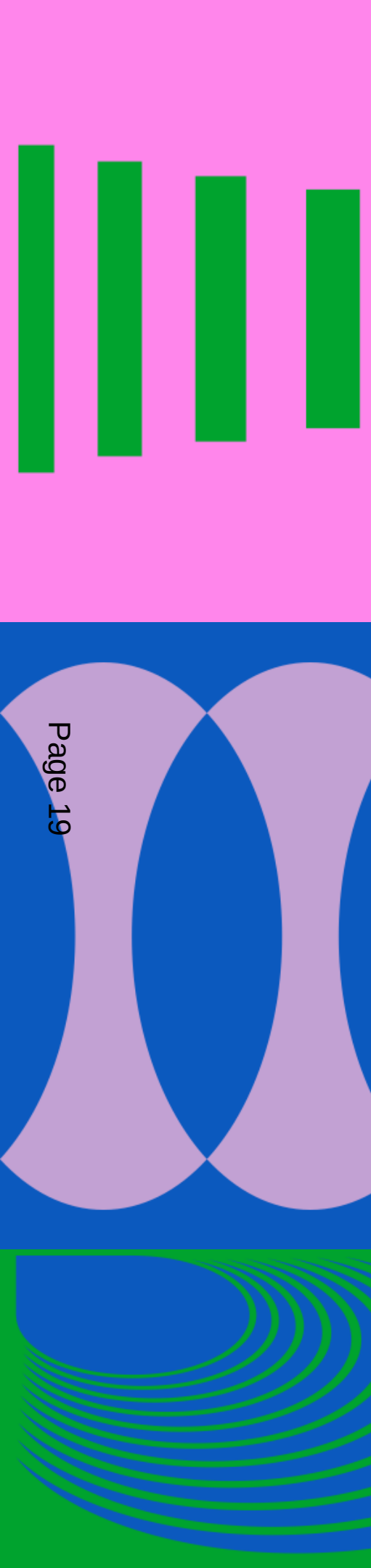
Key Survey findings

Employment

- Lack of opportunities (66%).
- People want more access to opportunities for autistic people.
- Linked to the need for better reasonable adjustments at work.

Education

- Better education opportunities to improve employment options.
- Better SEN support in schools – particularly around training for staff to be better at recognising SEN.



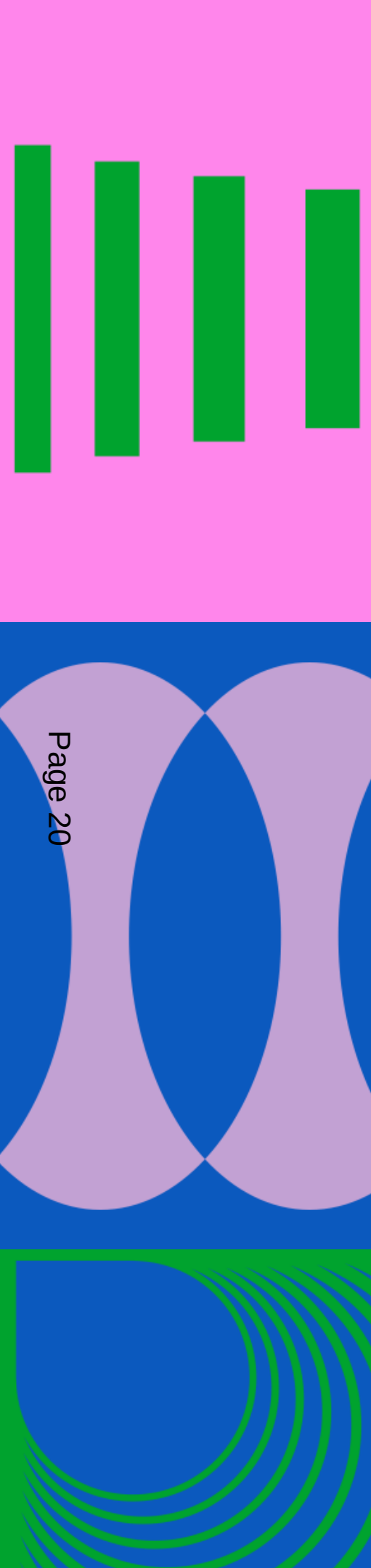
Key Survey findings

Involvement & Co-production

- 79.69% said they don't feel listened to or properly involved in decisions.
- Strong desire for co-production and inclusion of lived experience experts.

Financial Support

- 53.13% said they don't know where to get help with money, benefits, or bills.
- Need for clearer signposting and accessible financial advice.



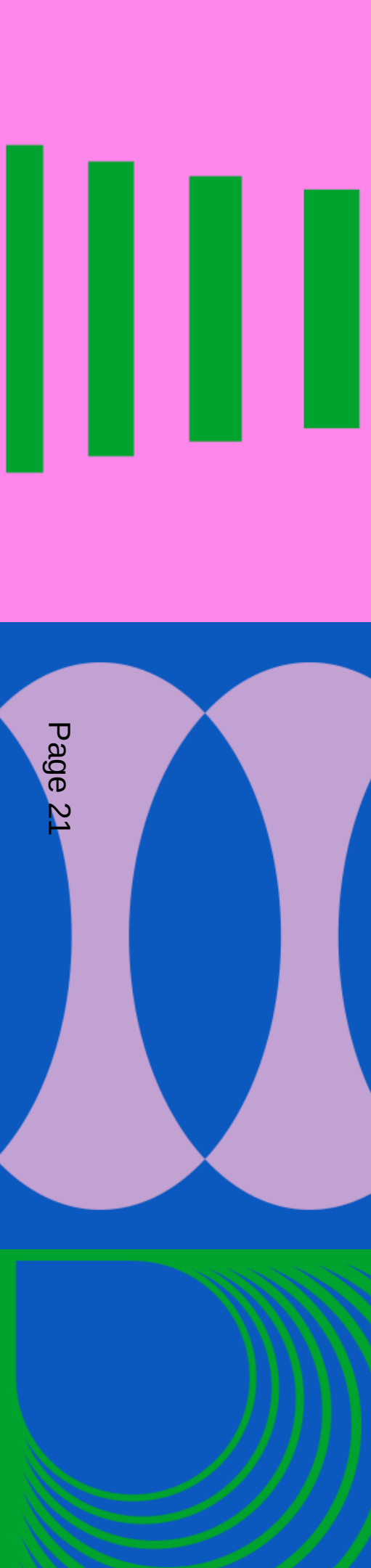
Key Survey findings

Access to support

- Many described services as slow, poor quality, and hard to access.
- Family carers appreciated support but noted it required persistent effort.
- Barriers include being questioned about needs, lack of clarity, and long waiting times.

Sensory & Quiet Spaces

- Requests for quiet, sensory-friendly environments in public and community spaces.
- Barriers to access include lighting, noise, heat, and crowded spaces.
- Emotional barriers such as anxiety, masking, and fear of judgment were frequently mentioned.



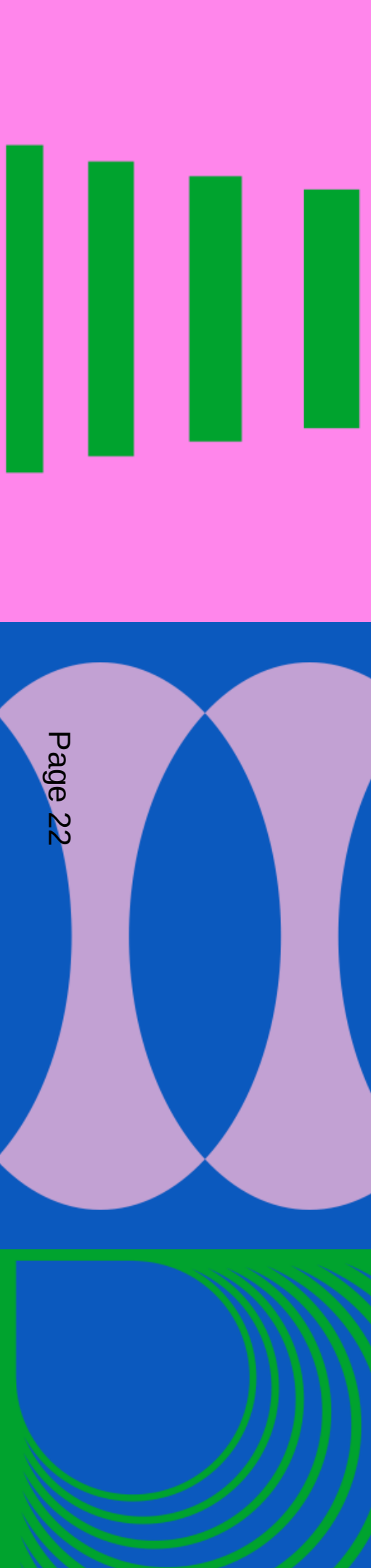
Key Survey findings

Safety & Housing

- Mixed responses: some feel safe and settled, others report bullying, anti-social behaviour, and unsafe neighbourhoods.
- Emotional safety is a concern, especially in public and social settings.

Healthcare

- Reinforced need for autism-specific training for health professionals.
- Respondents want more compassionate and informed care, especially during diagnosis and mental health support.



Key Survey findings

Community & Belonging

- Many feel isolated or lack spaces where they belong.
- Desire for inclusive community spaces and social opportunities.

Celebrating Autism

- Continued call to celebrate autism in Darlington.
- Suggestions included awareness events, positive representation, and community education.

Next meeting

Any Questions ?

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**ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 OCTOBER 2025**

Adult Social Care Budget and Projected Outturn 2025/26

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an overview of the Adult Social Care (ASC) budget for Darlington Borough Council, including financial outturns, current pressures and challenges, and the transformation plans in place to address these issues and improve service delivery.

Summary

2. ASC in Darlington continues to face significant financial and operational pressures. These are driven by demographic changes, increasing demand for services, workforce challenges, and the need to modernise service delivery. Despite these pressures, the Council remains committed to delivering high-quality, person-centred care and support, with a strong focus on prevention, early intervention, and community-based solutions.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members of the Adults Scrutiny Committee:
 - a) Note the current budget position and financial pressures.
 - b) Endorse the transformation plans outlined in the report.
 - c) Support ongoing engagement with partners, providers, service users, and carers to shape future service delivery.

**Joss Harbron
Assistant Director Adults Social Care**

Background Papers

- a) [Council Plan 2024–2027](#)
- b) [Market Position Statement and Commissioning Strategy 2024–2027](#)
- c) [Medium-Term Financial Plan](#)
- d) [Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2028](#)
- e) <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/q4couxmc/vision-for-adult-social-care-in-darlington.pdf>

Joss Harbron: 5278

Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key outcomes with regards to ASC.
Addressing inequalities	This involves members in the scrutiny of the level to which ASC contributes to ensuring that opportunities are accessible to everyone, with a focus on ensuring a good life, good health, home and/or social connections for all.
Tackling Climate Change	This report does not identify any issues relating to climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report allows for the scrutiny of performance which is integral to optimising outcomes and ensuring efficient use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports performance improvement relating to improving the health and wellbeing of residents.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report does not represent a change in S17 Crime and Disorder.
Wards Affected	This report related to all wards within Darlington.
Groups Affected	This report supports people with care and support needs eligible under the Care Act 2014.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

4. In December 2021, the Government published a set of mutually reinforcing reforms which include the Health and Care Bill, Health and social care integration: joining up care for people, places and populations - a white paper which is part of the government's commitment to transform the delivery of care in England, the Build Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care and the ASC reform white paper- People at the Heart of Care.
5. These reforms resulted in a focus on the refreshing of Darlington's ASC priorities and, through a series of workshops with teams across the People group, we developed a new vision for ASC that reflected the new Health and Social Care Act 2022 with the purpose of pulling together all activity into a single transformation plan that linked to the vision.
6. This transformation plan incorporates Commissioning, Quality, Practice and Workforce development into a single plan along with the service reviews/redesigns that sat within the previous 2019 transformation plan. Adult Services have worked closely with the Commissioning and Contracting and transformation team to ensure there is a strong commitment to strength based approaches within the provider market, clear outcome focused approaches and a plan to meet the needs of local people.

7. The new transformation plan is also mindful of the demands, pressures post Covid e.g.:
 - a) Demographics, impact of Covid, workforce retention and capacity of the national cost of living situation, budget pressures, health inequalities loneliness, mental health, changing partnerships arrangements through development of the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) and place-based commissioning and the need to manage increasing demand.

The new Vision for Adult Social Care in Darlington 2023-2026

8. The ASC vision builds on the overall aims of the Council's strategic vision of THRIVE i.e.:
 - a) Together and Inclusive
 - b) Healthy and Safe
 - c) Resilient and Strong
 - d) Independent and Innovative
 - e) Valued and Respected
 - f) Educated and Aspirational
9. ASC will work together with residents, partners, and communities to enable the citizens of Darlington to maximise their independence (to be resilient, strong and healthy), their wellbeing (healthy, safe and inclusive), to have care and support when they need it (together, valued and respected and safe) and to empower them to contribute to and feel valued in their communities (independence, innovation, valued, inclusive and educated).
10. The vision is grouped under a number of key themes and strategic objectives to produce a delivery plan:

The Transformation delivery plan 2023-2026

Themes	Strategic objectives
❖ Amazing practice through strength-based working and strength based workforce	• Service user/carers engagement, feedback and co-production (the person's voice is central to everything we do). • Ensuring Strength based approaches and practice (working with partners and the community). • Highly trained and skilled workforce working in line with internal strategies and procedures. • Ensuring people can maintain independence or are re-abled to regain their independence. • Ensuring we support the prevention, reduction of delay of social care needs. • Assess, support and commission support and care where and when needed.
❖ Creating the right conditions through Market developing, shaping and commissioning	• Commissioning Services to meet current and future need.

Themes	Strategic objectives
	• Working wider community assets providing outcomes and making a real difference. • Work with partners in the system to develop, deliver and achieve positive outcomes for people within our community.
❖ Ensuring safety and wellbeing	• Effective Safeguarding - Ensuring safety for person, safe systems of practice and working. • Ensuring continuity of care including supporting young people through to adulthood.
❖ Enabling delivery ❖ Ensuring quality is everyone's business	• We will ensure there is strategic leadership and a learning workforce enabling successful delivery of our statutory responsibilities. • We will ensure we are a learning organisation; we will listen, improve and know our services and ensure we achieve positive outcomes for people. • Systems, policies, procedures, practice guidance and governance (that support effective social work and social care practice). • Inspection readiness- baselines, evidence collation. • Efficient, well managed budgets delivering services and support within the budget, being responsive to pressures and anticipating demand. • Intelligence led Service development and planning. • Intelligence Led Business Planning. • Improved Digital and Communications (inc. web, information, self-service, use of technology).

11. The Council's transformation strategy is guided by the Market Position Statement and Commissioning Strategy 2024–2027, which outlines the following priorities:

- a) Prevention and Early Intervention: Investing in digital technology, aids, and adaptations to support independence.
- b) Community-Based Support: Expanding housing options and care at home to reduce reliance on residential care.
- c) Integrated Working: Strengthening partnerships with health, housing, and VCSE organisations.
- d) Carer Support: Enhancing access to information and support for unpaid carers.
- e) Market Engagement: Building strong relationships with providers to co-design services and ensure quality assurance.

Budget Overview

12. Darlington Borough Council has allocated a significant portion of its overall budget to ASC. However, the service continues to operate under considerable financial strain. The Council has identified savings of £3.651 million in 2025/26 and £21.4 million over the next four years, with ASC identified as a key area of pressure.
13. Budget for 2025/2026 based on the most recent data from Darlington Borough Council's Medium Term Financial Plan and Adults Scrutiny Committee reports, the gross ASC budget for 2025/26 is approximately £64.9 million, and it is broken down across the following key service areas:

Adult Social Care Budget Breakdown by Service Area (2025/26)

Service Area	Budget (Gross) (£m)	Description
Older People Services	26.7	Residential, nursing, and home care for older adults.
Learning Disabilities	21.8	Supported living, day services, and residential care.
Mental Health Services	3.9	Community and residential support for adults with mental health needs.
Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment	7.8	Support for adults with physical disabilities and sensory needs.
Carers Support and Direct Payments	0.3	Support for unpaid carers and personal budgets.
Management and Overheads	4.4	Staffing, ICT, training, and operational costs.

Total gross expenditure	Income	Grant Income	Net Budget
£64.9M	£14M	£3M	£47.9M

14. Current Budget Position at Quarter One (June 2025): Overall project variance is an underspend of £18k.
15. External Packages of Care (EPC) movement of approximately £69k.
 - (a) Reductions:
 - i. £175k due to delays in hospital discharges
 - ii. £442k additional grant income
 - (b) Pressures:
 - i. £447k for residential placement

ii. £110k new home care provisions

16. Learning Disability Long Term Conditions budget pressure of approximately £40k:
 - (a) Holicote – pressure of £32k due to additional agency costs and repair costs.
 - (b) Supported Living – Pressure of £26k due to agency costs
 - (c) Day Services – saving of £17k, due to additional income
17. Mental Health Long Term Condition – Saving of £8k due to staffing.
18. Older People Long Term Condition – Pressure of £8k due to maternity cover.
19. Service Development and Integration – Saving of £5k for reduction in phones charges, replaced with Wavenet.
20. Current Debt Position – June 2025

The total outstanding debt is broken down into two categories: Residential & Nursing and Non-Residential, with further segmentation by the age of the debt.

	Residential & Nursing	Non-Residential
60–89 Days:	£229,047	£37,163
90–180 Days:	£428,044	£85,117
180–365 Days:	£1,005,341	£140,015
Over 365 Days:	£2,273,330	£1,185,044
	Total: £3,935,762	Total: £1,447,339

21. Some of the outstanding debt is attributed to specific circumstances:
 - a) Individuals lacking mental capacity, now managed by the Financial Protection Team.
 - b) Direct payment recipients.
 - c) Debt escalated to legal recovery.
 - d) Executors awaiting probate.
 - e) Cases on hold due to complaints or disputes.
 - f) Individuals under safeguarding.
 - g) Awaiting family to apply for appointeeship or deputyship.
22. These situations can delay debt recovery for months or even years.

23. ASC and the Finance team are working together to reduce debt and improve processes through the transformation programme by:

a) Strengthening Financial Capacity & Support:

- i. Early identification of individuals lacking mental capacity and prompt referral to the Financial Protection Team.
- ii. Proactive engagement with families to encourage timely applications for appointeeship or deputyship.
- iii. Provide clear guidance and support for navigating financial responsibilities, especially for carers and families.

b) Improved Direct Payment Oversight:

- i. Introduce regular audits and check-ins for individuals receiving direct payments.
- ii. Use prepaid cards or managed accounts to improve transparency and reduce misuse.
- iii. Offer training and support to help individuals manage their budgets effectively.
- iv. Delivering co-produced training to ASC teams on Direct payment usage.

c) Legal and Probate Processes

- i. Work closely with legal teams to streamline debt recovery once cases are escalated.
- ii. Maintain a tracking system for executor cases to ensure timely follow-up.

d) Tackling Aged Debt Proactively

- i. Identified an aged debt recovery role focused on debts over 180 days.
- ii. Use predictive analytics to identify cases at risk of becoming long-term debt.
- iii. Prioritise high-value cases for early intervention.

e) Enhanced Communication & Engagement

- i. Improve billing clarity and frequency to reduce confusion and disputes.
- ii. Use multi-channel reminders (letters, calls, emails) for overdue payments.
- iii. Offer flexible payment plans to encourage partial repayments.

f) Strengthened Internal Processes

- i. Ensure timely financial assessments and invoicing.
- ii. Reduce delays caused by complaints or safeguarding investigations through faster resolution pathways.
- iii. Invest in staff training and digital tools to improve efficiency.

g) Monitoring and Reporting

- i. Regularly review debt data to identify trends, problem areas and monitor progress.
- ii. Share monthly dashboards with operational teams to drive accountability.

Key Pressures and Challenges

- 24. Demographic Change: Darlington has an aging population, with 20.5% aged 65+, higher than the national average. This trend is expected to continue, increasing demand for care services.
- 25. Workforce Shortages: Recruitment and retention of care staff remain challenging, impacting service capacity and quality.
- 26. Financial Constraints: Rising costs, inflation, increases in national living wage and employer national insurance contributions have increased ASC costs.
- 27. Complex Needs: There is a growing need for services that support people with complex needs, including supported living and transitions to adulthood.
- 28. Market Sustainability: Ensuring a diverse and resilient provider market is critical, especially in light of post-pandemic recovery and economic uncertainty.
- 29. Integrated care Board structure changes including exploration of tightening the Continuing Health care eligibility could shift the financial burden to local authorities, delegation of healthcare tasks whilst ICB's focus on strategic commissioning.

Consultation

- 30. Ongoing engagement with partners, Members, people using services, carers, and providers is central to the transformation approach.
- 31. Feedback mechanisms are embedded in commissioning processes to ensure services reflect local needs and preferences.

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 October 2025

WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 Municipal Year and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included.

Summary

2. Members are requested to consider the attached draft work programme (**Appendix 1**) for the remainder of the Municipal Year, which has been prepared based on Officers recommendations and discussions held at the Adults Scrutiny Committee Annual Briefing which took place on 23 May 2025.
3. Once the work programme has been approved by this Scrutiny Committee, any additional areas of work which Members wish to add to the agreed work programme will require the completion of a quad of aims in accordance with the previously approved procedure (**Appendix 2**).

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Members note the current status of the Work Programme and consider any additional areas of work they would like to include.
5. Members' views are requested.

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Background Papers

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

Author: James McAllister

Council Plan	The report contributes to the Council Plan in a number of ways through the involvement of Members in contributing to the delivery of the Plan. The Work Programme contains items which enable Members to scrutinise those areas that contribute the priority of Living Well – a healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most, and Communities - working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities.
Addressing inequalities	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council's Efficiency Programme.
Health and Wellbeing	This report has no direct implications to the Health and Well Being of residents of Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Wards Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Ward is considered to be minimal.
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Group is considered to be minimal.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. The format of the proposed work programme has been reviewed to enable Members of this Scrutiny Committee to provide a rigorous and informed challenge to the areas for discussion.
7. The Council Plan was adopted on 18 July 2024, and outlines Darlington Borough Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for action over the next three years. It gives strategic direction to the Council and Council services, defining priorities, identifying key actions, and shaping delivery.
8. The Council Plan identifies six priorities, one of which is 'Living Well', which states that more years in good health leads to more fulfilling lives, and a better standard of living, however the Plan highlights that there are inequalities in Darlington across all stages of life which are influenced by broader social factors including education, employment, housing and income. Seven key deliverables are identified as part of this priority.
9. The Council believes that all residents should have the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives, and wants to support residents of every age to live well. The Council has committed to improving our contact with carers and working to create a network of support for better health and wellbeing outcomes. The Council will support those who need it most and signpost for access to other provision and support, where appropriate.

Forward Plan and Additional Items

10. Once the Work Programme has been agreed by this Scrutiny Committee, any Member seeking to add a new item to the work programme will need to complete a Quad of Aims.
11. A copy of the index of the Forward Plan has been attached at **Appendix 3** for information.

Climate Considerations

12. Pursuant to Minute AD22/Oct/2024, any matters pertaining to climate considerations will be outlined in the individual reports submitted to Committee.

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ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role / Notes
Safeguarding	10 th June 2025	Rachel Watt / Barbara Beadle		
Assessment of Services Commissioned from Out of Area	26 th August 2025	Sukhdev Dosanjh		
Performance Indicators End of Year Report 2024/25	26 th August 2025	Joss Harbron / Sharon Raine / Wendy Excell	ASC 002 ASC 003 ASC 019 ASC 045 ASC 046 ASC 049 ASC 050 ASC 208 ASC 209 ASC 211	To monitor Key Performance Indicators. To receive six-monthly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary.
CQC Assurance Framework Update	26 th August 2025	Joss Habron		
Adult Social Care Budget and Outturn	28 th October 2025	Joss Habron		
Autism Strategy and Action Plan Update	28 th October 2025	Jo Butler (jo.butler@inclusionnorth.org), Joss Harbron.		
Domestic Abuse Strategy - Update	6 th January	Christine Shields		
Medium Term Financial Plan	6 th January 2026	Brett Nielsen		

Current day service provision for adults with learning disabilities in Darlington and future commissioning plans	6 th January 2026	Joss Habron/Sukhdev Dosanjh		
Darlington Association on Disability (DAD)	6 th January 2026	Lauren Robinson		
Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2025/2026	24 th February 2026	Joss Harbron / Sharon Raine / Wendy Excell	ASC 002 ASC 003 ASC 019 ASC 045 ASC 046 ASC 049 ASC 050 ASC 208 ASC 209 ASC 211	To monitor Key Performance Indicators. To receive six-monthly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary.
Care Homes in Executive Strategy Measures / Arrangements	24 th February 2026	Rachel Watt / Joss Harbron / Barbara Beadle		

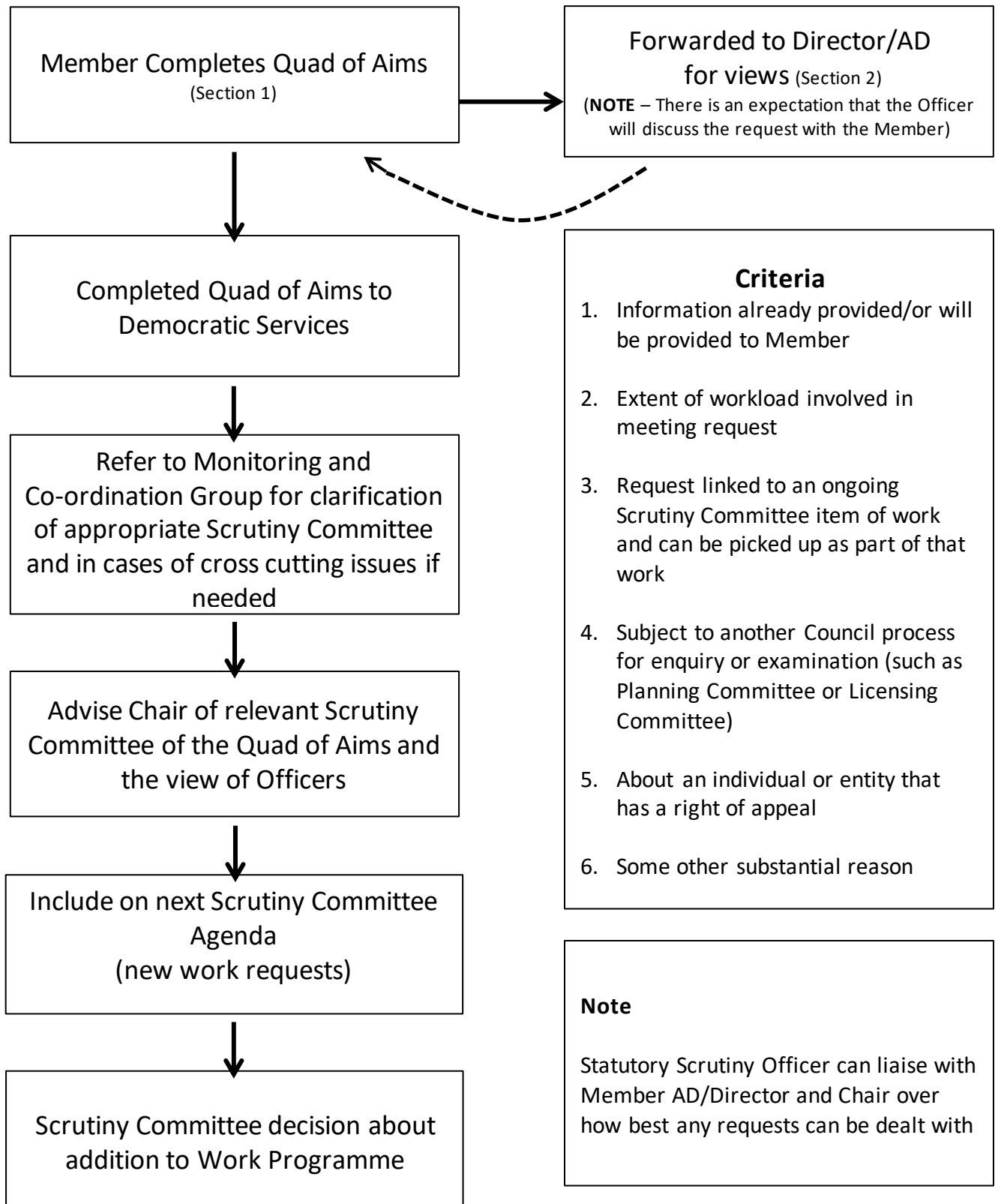
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership - Annual Report	24th February 2026	Amanda Hugill	ASC 028 ASC 029 ASC 059 ASC 061 ASC 062 ASC 199 ASC 200 ASC 201 ASC 202 ASC 203 ASC 204 ASC 205 ASC 206 ASC 207 ASC 209 ASC 210 ASC 213 ASC 214	To consider the Annual Report on the work of the Board and to receive reassurance that adult safeguarding is being addressed and an effective approach is in place. To be advised of the key issues for the Board and funding.
Overview by Commissioning Services on Shared Lives	14 th April 2026	Christine Shields		
CQC Action Plan	Date to be confirmed	Joss Harbron		
Principle Social Worker Feedback Report	Date to be confirmed	Joss Harbron		

Task and Finish Review Group(s)

- **‘Loneliness and Connected Communities’ Task and Finish Review Group** – commenced Tuesday, 28th January 2020;

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PROCESS FOR ADDING AN ITEM TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WORK PROGRAMME



QUAD OF AIMS (MEMBERS' REQUEST FOR ITEM TO BE CONSIDERED BY SCRUTINY)

SECTION 1 TO BE COMPLETED BY MEMBERS

NOTE – This document should only be completed if there is a clearly defined and significant outcome from any potential further work. This document should **not** be completed as a request for or understanding of information.

REASON FOR REQUEST?	RESOURCE (WHAT OFFICER SUPPORT WOULD YOU REQUIRE?)
PROCESS (HOW CAN SCRUTINY ACHIEVE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOME?)	HOW WILL THE OUTCOME MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Signed Councillor

Date

SECTION 2 TO BE COMPLETED BY DIRECTORS/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS
(NOTE – There is an expectation that Officers will discuss the request with the Member)

Page 43

		Criteria
1.	(a) Is the information available elsewhere? Yes No If yes, please indicate where the information can be found (attach if possible and return with this document to Democratic Services) (b) Have you already provided the information to the Member or will you shortly be doing so?	1. Information already provided/or will be provided to Member 2. Extent of workload involved in meeting request 3. Request linked to an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and can be picked up as part of that work
2.	If the request is included in the Scrutiny Committee work programme what are the likely workload implications for you/your staff?	4. Subject to another Council process for enquiry or examination (such as Planning Committee or Licensing Committee)
3.	Can the request be included in an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and picked up as part of that?	5. About an individual or entity that has a right of appeal
4.	Is there another Council process for enquiry or examination about the matter currently underway?	6. Some other substantial reason
5.	Has the individual or entity some other right of appeal?	
6.	Is there any substantial reason (other than the above) why you feel it should not be included on the work programme ?	

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Signed **Position** **Date**

**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
FORWARD PLAN**

APPENDIX 3

DARLINGTON
Borough Council

**FORWARD PLAN
FOR THE PERIOD: 1 OCTOBER 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026**

Title	Decision Maker and Date
Procurement Plan Update	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025
Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF) Update	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025
Council Tax Support Scheme 2026-27	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Use of Land at Faverdale (Former St Modwen Land) for Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality Credits	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Housing Revenue Account MTFP	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Housing Services Tenancy Policy 2025-2030	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Mid-Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management 2025/26	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
MTFP for consultation	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Schedule of Transactions	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Climate Change Progress	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Council Plan Performance Report - Quarter 4	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Council Tax Calculation of Tax Base 2026/27	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Land at Ingenium Parc and Morton Palms - Development Proposal	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Maintained Schools Capital Programme Summer 2025	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Year End Performance Report - Quarter 4	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Capital Strategy	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
MTFP 2025/26 - Final Version Post Consultation	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 3	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Schools Admissions 2025/26	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Town Centre Regeneration	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026

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