

HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 January 2026

PRESENT – Councillors Johnson (Chair), Anderson, Crudass, Holroyd, Layton and M Nicholson

APOLOGIES – Councillors Beckett, Pease and Mrs Scott

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Roche

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Lorraine Hughes (Director of Public Health), Rebecca Morgan (Public Health Portfolio Lead), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Claire Gardner-Queen (Head of Housing), Sarah Williams (Housing Manager – Income Management), Steven Campbell (Head of Assurance and Compliance), Warren Edge (Senior Associate Director of Assurance and Compliance), Chris Morton (Lived Experience Manager), Beverley Murphy (Chief Nurse & Deputy CEO), Sarah Paxton (Head of communications) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

HH30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Anderson declared an interest in Minute HH33 and left the meeting during the consideration of this item. There were no further declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

HH31 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 29 OCTOBER 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 29 October 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 29 October 2025 be approved as a correct record.

HH32 COUNTY DURHAM AND DARLINGTON NHS FOUNDATION TRUST - Q2 QUALITY ACCOUNT UPDATE

The Senior Associate Director of Assurance and Compliance, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the Trust's progress against its Quality Accounts for 2025/26. A presentation (also previously circulated) accompanied the report.

It was reported that the priorities for 2025/26 reflected the priorities in the 'Quality Matters' strategy and those priorities brought forward from 2024/25 where further work was required; and that the Breast Service review remained a key focus, with a significant programme of work underway.

The submitted report outlined the aims/progress, current position, RAG rating and further actions for each quality indicator with particular reference being made to those areas of under-achievement where urgent and focussed action was needed.

It was reported that the quality strategy would be reset going forward and that sustaining improvements in the Breast Service and undertaking the improvement actions from the Aubrey report would be a key focus.

In relation to the priority 'reducing harm from healthcare associated infections' Members sought further information regarding the timescales for reducing infections, in particular CPE and further clarification in respect of waterless bathing for patients. Members were assured that monthly audits of all fundamental practices took place, with focused work on departments needing improvement. The Director of Public Health informed Members that a CPE leaflet and poster was being developed and that a blended approach was still in place, depending on the needs of the patient. Discussion also ensued regarding Martha's rule, with Members noting that audits were undertaken on a quarterly basis.

RESOLVED – That the progress against the Trust's priorities be noted.

HH33 TEES, ESK AND WEAR VALLEY NHS FOUNDATION TRUST - QUALITY ACCOUNT QUALITY PRIORITIES PROGRESS (Q3 25/26)

The Lived Experience Care Group Director and Associate Director of Quality Governance, Compliance and Quality Data, Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) submitted a presentation (previously circulated) outlining progress on the Trust's Quality Account Quality Priorities for Quarter 3 2025/26, including key updates on delivery of the established measures.

It was reported that in April 2024, the Trust's Quality Assurance Committee endorsed a new approach to development of the Quality Priorities whereby the priorities were co-created and led by people with lived experience; and that this approach enabled the voice of service users, relatives and carers to be at the heart of quality improvement across the organisation.

The three key priorities for 2025/26, Promoting education using lived experience, Relapse prevention and Improving personalisation in urgent care were outlined; Members were informed of the measures developed to deliver the priorities; and welcomed key updates for the priorities.

Discussion ensued regarding the capacity and wait times for services within the Trust. Members were informed that there was variance across services, with a rapid response to urgent care and longer wait times for services such as neurodevelopment assessments.

Following a query regarding the voice of service Members were assured that voices of services users were being captured, with 60 peer support workers and clear established forums and networks for service users; and in relation to relapse prevention, training was offered to empower service users alongside their carers.

Reference was made to the public inquiry and the Chief Nurse and Deputy CEO, TEWV advised Members that the Trust recognised the importance of the inquiry; that they were awaiting the scope of the inquiry, which would be developed with the families involved; and that the Trust continued to support and offer their sincere and heartfelt condolences to the families who had lost loved ones.

RESOLVED – That the Trust’s progress on the Quality Priorities measures for 2025/26 be noted.

HH34 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27 - 2029/30

The Assistant Director Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that Members give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026/27 to 2029/30, which had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 2 December, as a basis for consultation.

The submitted report stated that an MTFP Briefing that was delivered to Members on 15 December outlining the overall contents of the MTFP, and requested that Members of this Scrutiny Committee now consider contents in relation to the services and finances within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee to enable a response to be formulated and forwarded to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its meeting scheduled to be held on 20 January 2026.

The Assistant Director of Resources provided an update on the draft Local Government finance settlement, which had been received on 17 December, subsequent to the approval of the draft MTFP by Cabinet and advised on the impact this draft settlement had on the assumptions made within that approved draft MTFP.

Following a question regarding the Public Health Grant, Members were informed that this is ring-fenced and there are conditions for expenditure; that nationally there had been a real-term reduction in this grant of 24 per cent since 2015/16, however there was a welcome uplift to the grant in 25/26 and the continuation of additional grant funding relating to stopping smoking, supervised toothbrushing and drug and alcohol services has been confirmed as part of the most recent grant allocations. Members also noted that around 32 per cent of the grant was invested across other Council departments to support health and wellbeing. Members requested a detailed breakdown of Public Health spend.

Discussion ensued regarding the range of grant funding schemes, with Members questioning whether these were ring fenced grants. Members were informed that there was some discretion in relation to how the grants were allocated within the Council; and following a comment regarding a move to more in house services, Members were advised of the cross department working that existed within the Council.

Following a query regarding fees and charges, Members were informed that individual officers were responsible for reviewing and setting their fees and charges and that a suggestion had been put forward by the Members of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee to increase those fees and charges that were staff based in line with the Consumer Price Index.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised that the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the MTFP 2026/27 to 2029/30.

(b) That the Chair, in consultation with the Lead Scrutiny Officers supporting this Scrutiny

Committee, be given authority to agree the Minutes of this Scrutiny Committee, to enable the Minutes to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 20 January 2026.

HH35 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - MTFP 2026-27 TO 2029-30

The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026-27 to 2029-30 (also previously circulated) prior to recommendation by Cabinet on 3 February 2026 and Council on 19 February 2026.

The submitted report requested that Members give consideration the recommendations agreed by Cabinet in relation to the revenue budget, capital programme, rent levels and service charges for the Council's HRA for the financial year 2026-27 in the context of the HRA MTFP to 2029-30 and the 30-year business plan.

The Head of Housing provided an update on the consultation exercise undertaken with Council tenants and Members were pleased to note a response rate of 24.9 per cent.

Following a query regarding the proposed meal charges for Extra Care Schemes, Members were informed that in previous years the Council had subsidised the costs by 40 per cent and it was agreed last year to spread those cost increases over 2 years. This resulted in the meals charge being increased by 20 per cent in 2025/26, with the remaining 20 per cent proposed to be increased in 2026/27, to ensure the full cost is covered.

Members entered into a discussion regarding right to buy with Members noting that demand had decreased significantly from the previous year; and in relation to the housing waiting list, Members were advised that the Band 1 waiting list had reduced significantly over the last year. It was reported that the demand for homelessness services was still high and temporary accommodation remained full however stays in temporary accommodation were shorter.

Following a question, Members were informed that to date £1M had been spent by the Council to acquire properties, with 12 purchased in the previous year; the majority of properties purchased were former council homes and were undergoing refurbishment. Members noted the intention for half of the properties to be used as temporary accommodation for residents.

RESOLVED – That this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026-27 to 2029-30.

HH36 DEEP DIVE: SUICIDE PREVENTION

The Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members in relation to the priority of reducing suicide rates in Darlington; an update on the current data, work currently underway and planned next steps and challenges; and an overview of the different services available locally to support good mental health, including specific suicide prevention services.

The submitted report stated that rates of suicide in Darlington were higher than the England average and the third highest in the North East; that rates were higher in men in particular aged 45-64; and that local authorities had a lead responsibility for coordinating local action to support suicide prevention, working alongside other statutory partners and local community organisations in order to be effective and reduce duplication.

It was reported that suicidal thoughts and actions rarely occurred in isolation but were the result of a complex interactions of people's individual factors, social and economic circumstances and cultural expectations; and therefore, a system-wide approach was needed to address the wider challenges facing those in suicidal crisis. The report outlined the key actions and opportunities.

Details were provided on statistics relating to suicide including inequalities by age and sex, self harm admission and the report outlined the suicide prevention approach and the associated areas for action. Particular reference was made to the work being undertaken in respect of men's mental health support, including a task and finish group that had been established to develop a marketing campaign to highlight the specific support available in Darlington for men experiencing suicidal crisis.

Reference was also made to training as a key area for action. Members were advised that community based training was being commissioned by the local authority which would be open to people within the borough and that training dates would be shared with Members. Details were also provided on the post-vention support after suicide (commissioned by the ICB) which includes practical and emotional support to those affected by suicide or suspected suicide and is provided by If U Care Share Foundation.

Discussion ensued regarding the suicide statistics; and Members sought clarification regarding the follow-up within 48 hours for those discharged from mental health in-patient admissions and implications of organisations practicing the 72 hour time frame in line with NHS guidelines.

Further discussion ensued regarding the support services in place for adults; and Members raised concern regarding the impact of gambling on mental health and queried the availability of grants and education programmes to address this. The Director of Public Health advised Members that there was increasing evidence to suggest gambling was a risk factor for suicide; that a regional gambling public health network had been established and work was ongoing in this area including gambling now being part of the Make Every Contact Count training offer; and a gambling health needs assessment had been developed by public health and was awaiting publication.

A Member in attendance at the meeting extended their thanks, recognising the work undertaken in relation to suicide prevention in the past year.

RESOLVED – That Members of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee: -

- a) Accept the content of the report
- b) Consider the recommendations and key actions set out in the report, and the role of elected members and scrutiny in supporting them.
- c) Identify any further opportunities to address the important issue of suicide

prevention.

HH37 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 2 - 2025/26

The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues, Head of Leisure and Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with performance data against key performance indicators for Quarter 2 2025/26.

It was reported that 35 indicators were reported to this Scrutiny Committee, nine were updated on a six-monthly basis and twenty-six annually, with annual indicators updated throughout the year. Members were informed that there were six Housing and Culture indicators and twenty-three Public Health indicators.

The report stated that, when taking into consideration what was the best performance for each indicator and comparing against the same period from the previous year, that three of the six housing indicators had improved and three were not as good; that four of the six leisure indicators had improved and 2 indicators were not as good; and 12 of the 23 indicators for Public Health had improved and 11 indicators were not as good.

Particular discussion ensued regarding letting times, which had seen an increase due to resource challenges, and recruitment of tradespeople. Members were advised that additional resources were being brought in which was resulting in an improvement in letting times.

RESOLVED – That the submitted report be noted.

HH38 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest for inclusion in the previously approved work programme.

Discussion ensued on the current work programme with Members noting the request to defer the item 'Healthy Weight Plan'.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

HH39 HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

It was reported that the Board last met on 4 December 2025 and that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled for 19 March 2026.

RESOLVED – That Members of this Scrutiny Committee continue to receive the Minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

HH40 REGIONAL HEALTH SCRUTINY

The Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee last met on 11 December 2025 and the next meeting of the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 12 March 2026.

Members noted the approved Minutes from the meeting held on 17 July 2025 and 2 October 2025 (previously circulated).

RESOLVED – That Members look forward to receiving an update of the work of the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee