



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 2 October 2025

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

Members of the Public are welcome to attend this Meeting.

1. Introductions / Attendance at Meeting.
2. Minutes - To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of this Council held on 17 July 2025 (Pages 5 - 10)
3. Declarations of Interest.
4. Sealing.
5. Announcements.
6. Questions - To answer questions (where appropriate notice has been given from):-
 - (a) The Public;
 - (b) Members to Cabinet/Chairs;
7. Council Reports.
 - (a) Electoral Review - Council Size Submission – Report of the Chief Executive (Pages 11 - 84)
8. Cabinet Reports.
 - (a) Dolphin Centre Asset Management and Investment Opportunities –

Report of the Executive Director – Environment, Highways and Community Services
(Pages 85 - 102)

- (b) Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy – Report of the Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection (Pages 103 - 118)
 - (c) Treasury Management Annual Report and Outturn Prudential Indicators 2024/25 – Report of the Executive Director, Resources and Governance (Pages 119 - 138)
 - (d) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council; (Pages 139 - 142)
 - (e) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 143 - 148)
 - (f) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 149 - 152)
 - (g) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 153 - 160)
 - (h) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 161 - 166)
 - (i) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 167 - 174)
 - (j) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 175 - 178)
 - (k) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 179 - 184)
9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-
- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 185 - 188)
 - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 189 - 190)
 - (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 191 - 194)
 - (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 195 - 198)
 - (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 199 - 202)

10. Notice of Motion

- (a) To consider a Motion submitted by Councillor Dulston and seconded by Councillor Bartch –
Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF)

That this Council notes:

- a. Darlington is one of seven authorities involved in the Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF).

- b. the scheme lacks both district heating and funded carbon capture.
- c. the proposed 30-year contract would tie Darlington into supplying waste, with penalties if volumes fall.
- d. future carbon costs and overcapacity risks make the project a major financial gamble.

That this Council believes:

- a. locking into decades of incineration is incompatible with improving recycling.
- b. “CCS-ready” is meaningless without guaranteed delivery.
- c. the financial and environmental risks of TVERF outweigh any benefits.

That this Council resolves to:

- a. ask Cabinet to withdraw from the TVERF project.

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

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

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Wednesday, 24 September 2025

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

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

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact James McAllister, 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 Email: james.mcallister@darlington.gov.uk or Telephone 01325 403122

COUNCIL

Thursday, 17 July 2025

PRESENT – The Mayor, Councillors Anderson, Baker, Bartch, Coe, Cossins, Crumbie, Mrs Culley, Curry, Dillon, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Keir, Laing, Lawley, Layton, Lee, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Marshall, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M Nicholson, Pease, Porter, Ray, Renton, Robinson, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali, Allen, Beckett, Crudass, Garner, K Nicholson, Dr. Riley and Mrs Scott

32 MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 15 MAY 2025, 22 MAY 2025, AND 19 JUNE 2025.

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Council held on 15 May, 22nd May and 19th June 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of this Council held on 15 May, 22nd May and 19th June 2025. be approved as correct records.

33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest recorded at this meeting.

34 SEALING.

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

35 ANNOUNCEMENTS.

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

37 THE PUBLIC;

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

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

38 MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;

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

39 COUNCIL REPORTS.

40 PAVEMENT CAFE POLICY

The Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection, submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited Members to approve the final of the Council's revised Pavement Café Policy.

The submitted report sought Members' approval of a revised Pavement Café Policy, following public consultation and supported by the Licensing Committee, incorporating legislative changes, and to reflect the changing dynamics of the town.

RESOLVED – That Full Council approve this revised Pavement Café Policy, which will apply to all licences issued from the date of this agreement.

REASON - The recommendation is supported to ensure standards are maintained to protect the public, taking into account legislative changes and guidance issued to local authorities.

41 CABINET REPORTS.

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

42 ADOPTION OF FINALISED APPRAISAL FOR THE STOCKTON & DARLINGTON RAILWAY: NORTHGATE CONSERVATION AREA INCLUDING CHANGES TO ITS BOUNDARY AND NAME

The Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection, and the Cabinet Member for the Economy Portfolio, submitted a report (previously circulated) which sought Councillors' approval to adopt the finalised Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal, including changes to its boundary and name. The document that has been submitted is called *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Finalised document. March 2025.*

The report provides justification for adopting the finalised appraisal for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area. The draft version of the appraisal (September 2024) had been subject to a six-week public consultation period. Amendments have been made in light of the comments received.

Members in attendance congratulated both the Portfolio Holder for Economy and the Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection, for producing a fantastic and interesting report, and posed some technical questions.

RESOLVED - That:

- (a) Council adopts the finalised appraisal for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area.
- (b) Council adopts the finalised boundary for the Stockton & Darlington Railway:

Northgate Conservation Area (see chapter 6.0 of the appraisal).

- (c) Council adopts the name change from Northgate Conservation Area to Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area.
- (d) Council authorises the amendment of finalised Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal with regards to the text marked in yellow, to reflect the adopted status of the document. The adopted appraisal will be named: Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. March 2025.

Reasons –

- (a) The Northgate Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset of international significance due to its structures and associations directly linked to the birth/early years of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) of 1825. Despite its high importance, it has been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010.
- (b) The bicentennial of the S&DR is in September this year. The Council has been making significant investments in preparation for the celebrations inside the Conservation Area (e.g. Hopetown Darlington, Edward Pease house).
- (c) The current Northgate Conservation Area appraisal was adopted in January 2007 and is now deemed inadequate and out of date. The present Conservation Area boundary dates from 2003.
- (d) The new appraisal picks up some of the ‘unfinished’ work carried out by Durham County Council (2022) and Land Use Consultants (2021). It provides a detailed record and analysis of the existing Conservation Area, as well as proposals for boundary changes and name change, and suggestions for improvements so that the Conservation Area may eventually be removed from the Heritage at Risk register.
- (e) The responses on the draft document were generally very supportive of the appraisal and its proposals, including the feedback received from Historic England and the Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.
- (f) Once the new appraisal has been adopted it will provide an evidence base for managing change in the area and form a material consideration in the Planning process, replacing the 2007 document.
- (g) It will also assist if funding is sought for larger regeneration schemes within the amended boundary. Historic England confirmed that they will not provide funding for improvement works within the Conservation Area until the new appraisal, including boundary changes and name change, has been adopted.

43 CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Economy Portfolio, and the Executive Director,

Economy and Public Protection, submitted a report (previously circulated) to update Council progress towards the Council's net zero target.

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Economy Portfolio gave context regarding the actions taken by the service area since the last update, and informed Members on some of the workings of the Climate Change Working Group.

Members posed questions on some of the issues discussed in the Climate Change Working Group, specifically around investigations into increased carbon emissions, and fuel bills at Council venues. The Chair of the working group also reiterated their belief that the Council must take into account future needs of Net Zero into their current developments.

Members also made reference to the Tree and Woodland Policy, questioning whether a new strategy needs to be implemented to account for the high volume of trees being planted.

Thanks was also passed to the Climate Change Working Group for their efforts.

RESOLVED – That Council notes the contents of the report.

Reasons - The recommendations are supported by the increasing public pressure to act on climate change, the Council may run the risk of significant damage to its reputation if it does not deliver on its stated commitment to dealing with the Council's contribution to climate change.

44 DESIGNATION OF NEW MIDDLETON ST GEORGE CONSERVATION AREA AND ADOPTION OF FINALISED APPRAISAL

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Economy Portfolio, and the Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection, submitted a report (previously circulated) which sought approval to designate a new conservation area at Middleton St George and to adopt the corresponding appraisal. The submitted document was titled *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Middleton St George (Fighting Cocks) Conservation Area Appraisal. Finalised document. May 2025*.

The report provides justification for the designating a new conservation area at Middleton St George and adopting the corresponding appraisal. The draft version of the appraisal (December 2024) had been subject to a six-week public consultation period. Amendments have been made in light of the comments received.

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Economy Portfolio also made reference to comments made by Historic England, which have been addressed. The Cabinet Member also reiterated that the appraisal was wholly evidence based.

RESOLVED –

(a) Council adopts the new conservation area boundary at Middleton St George (see chapter 6.0 of the finalised appraisal).

(b) Council adopts the new conservation area's name: Stockton & Darlington Railway:

Middleton St George (Fighting Cocks) Conservation Area.

(c) Council adopts the finalised appraisal for the new Middleton St George Conservation Area.

(d) Council authorises the amendment of finalised appraisal with regards to the text marked in yellow, to reflect the adopted status of the document. The adopted appraisal will be named: Stockton & Darlington Railway: Middleton St George (Fighting Cocks) Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. May 2025.

Reasons –

(a) Fighting Cocks was an original stopping point (station) along the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) of 1825. The presence of the railway led to the establishment of the Middleton Iron Works in 1864, which sparked the development of the village of Middleton St George.

(b) The bicentennial of the S&DR is this year. There will be many events along the former route to celebrate the birth of the modern railway. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) has been making significant S&DR-related investments, and Middleton St George Parish Council is also preparing for its celebration within the village. Over the past few years, heritage assets at Fighting Cocks have been promoted through the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan, S&DR Heritage Action Zone and Fighting Cocks Heritage Hub.

(c) The appraisal demonstrates in detail that sufficient special interest survives at Middleton St George which is associated with the S&DR and the industrial development of the village justifying the designation of a conservation area. It picks up the 'unfinished' work by Durham County Council who proposed a (different) conservation area boundary for Middleton St George in 2022.

(d) The draft conservation area boundary proposed by DBC has generally been welcomed by residents who took part in the public consultation. It is also supported by the Friends of the S&DR and Middleton St George Parish Council. Amendments have been made following feedback received, including concerns raised by Historic England.

(e) Once the conservation area boundary has been adopted, the appraisal will provide an evidence base for managing change in the area and form a material consideration in the Planning process. Conservation area designation can also assist if funding is sought for larger regeneration or conservation schemes within the boundary.

(f) The appraisal also includes suggestions to improve the condition of the area. These are in line with the aims of the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan and the Fighting Cocks Heritage Hub.

45 UPDATED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - PART 1 (LOCAL PLAN)

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Economy Portfolio, and the Executive Director, Economy and Public Protection, submitted a report (previously circulated) which sought approval to adopt an updated version of its Statement of Community

Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan).

It was stated at the meeting that this update must commence every 5 years.

RESOLVED - That Council adopt the Updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan)

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

46 CABINET URGENT DECISIONS

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

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

REASON – To comply with the Council’s Constitution.

47 SCRUTINY REPORTS - TO CONSIDER SCRUTINY OVERVIEW REPORTS:-

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

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

Consideration was given to membership changes of the Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2025/26 that:

(a) Councillors Johnson and Kevin Nicholson replace Councillors Ali and Mahmud on the Police and Crime Panel.

(b) Councillor Garner replace Councillor Ali on the Joint Audit Committee.

(c) Councillors Mrs Culley and Bartch replace Councillors Mrs Scott and Durham on the Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group.

(d) Due to the revision to the political balance arrangements on the Combined Fire Authority, Darlington was allocated an additional seat for a Minority Group Member on the Authority’s Appeals Committee. Members therefore approved the appointment of Councillor Snedker to this seat.

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

ELECTORAL REVIEW - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

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

Responsible Director – Rose Rouse, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks Council's views on a proposed submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in relation to the future size of Darlington Borough Council.

Summary

2. The Council has been given the opportunity to make a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on the future size of the Council. A cross-party working group consisting of the four Group Leaders was set up to prepare a draft submission. A survey of member workloads and activity was undertaken to assist in the preparation of the submission. The submission also contains details of the governance arrangements for the Council, work on outside bodies and the work undertaken by Members in their capacity as community leaders. The submission is based on the criteria set out in the Council Size submission template provided by the LGBCE.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended:
 - (a) That a proposed Council Size of 41 Members be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (with a minority view of 42 Members also reflected within the submission).
 - (b) That the draft Council Size Submission be approved.
 - (c) That the submission be referred to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

- (d) That the Chief Executive in consultation with the four group leaders has delegated powers to make any necessary amendments to the Council Size Submission before final submission on 3 October 2025.

Reasons

4. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
- (a) The proposed number reflects detailed analysis of the information in the submission and was the view of the cross-party working group.
- (b) To enable the submission to comply with the deadlines set by the LGBCE.

Rose Rouse
Chief Executive

Background Papers

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

Paul Dalton: Extension 4805

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| Council Plan | The Council Size submission supports the core principle of efficient and effective use of resources by seeking to maintain convenient and effective local governance arrangements. |
| Addressing inequalities | There are no specific inequality issues other than those reflected in the submission in relation to the inequality in the ratio of Councillors to electors. |
| Tackling Climate Change | There are no specific issues in relation to tackling climate change within this report. |
| Efficient and effective use of resources | There is a small efficiency in the reduction of Members proposed in this report. |
| Health and Well Being | There are no specific implications for Health and Wellbeing. |
| S17 Crime and Disorder | This report has no implications for S17 Crime and Disorder. |
| Wards Affected | All Wards. |
| Groups Affected | All Groups. |
| Budget and Policy Framework | This 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 does not impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers. |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. A letter was received by the Chief Executive on 8 May 2025 explaining that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) intention to conduct an Electoral Review in Darlington. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 sets out the duty placed on the LGBCE to undertake an Electoral Review of every principle local authority in England 'from time to time', and the LGBCE usually conduct a review after three of four electoral cycles. Darlington was selected for review due to the time that has elapsed since the last review, which was undertaken between 2012 and 2014, and which came into effect in May 2015.
6. An initial meeting involving the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, the Chair of the LGBCE, Professor Colin Mellors and the Chief Executive of the LGBCE, Ailsa Irvine, took place on 27 May 2025. This was followed by a meeting between the Group Leaders and Officers from the LGBCE on 29 May 2025.
7. An All-Member briefing with Officers from the LGBCE was then held on 3 June 2025, and Officers from the LGBCE subsequently met with those Officers from Darlington Borough Council who would be supporting the review on 24 June 2025.
8. The purpose of an Electoral Review is to consider the number of Councillors elected to the Council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of Councillors to be elected to each ward. The LGBCE will attempt to ensure that each Councillor represents approximately the same number of electors as his or her colleagues on that Council. The LGBCE will aim to make recommendations which improve electoral equality, while at the same time trying to ensure that communities in the area are reflected and that convenient and effective local government is provided for.
9. The outcome of this review will be implemented at the Local Government (Borough) Elections in 2027.

Electoral Review – Process

10. The Electoral Review has two distinct parts:

Stage One – Council Size

11. The first stage of the review is to consider the Council size. The Council has been invited to provide a submission. The LGBCE will consider the Council's submission, and any other submissions received, before coming to a view on the total number of Councillors to be elected to the Council in the future.

12. In making the decision on Council size, the LGBCE believes that Councillors have three broad aspects to their role: -

- (a) **Strategic Leadership and Governance Arrangements** – the LGBCE will consider how elected member provide strategic leadership for the authority, and how the existing governance arrangements are exercised. Submissions should indicate how many members are required to fulfil these roles and why that figure is justified, with evidence that alternative Council sizes and governance arrangements have been considered.

The Commission will aim to ensure that Councils have the right number of Councillors to take decisions and manage the business of the Council in an effective manner, both now and in the future. As part of their submission, Councils are invited to provide evidence in relation to Cabinet and committee responsibilities, the number of Committees and their workloads, delegation to Officers, responsibilities on outside bodies, and future plans.

- (b) **Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships)** – the LGBCE will examine details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners are held to account, with the Commission looking at both the internal and external dimensions of this role. The Commission will look at the Council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision-making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies.

When considering Accountability, the LGBCE will seek evidence to demonstrate the number of Councillors required to effectively hold the decision-makers to account and ensure that the Council can discharge its responsibilities to other organisations (eg. other public-sector bodies, partnerships, and trusts). The LGBCE are keen to see that alternative approaches have been considered.

- (c) **Community Leadership / Representational Role** – The LGBCE recognises that there is no single approach to community leadership, and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission will look at how members engage with people, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations, as well as how members provide effective community leadership. The Commission will take into consideration the level of support that the Council provides to them to undertake this role.

Stage Two - Warding Patterns

13. Once the LGBCE has made a decision on the Council size and the Council has been duly notified, the review moves onto the second stage which is to give consideration to the warding arrangements based on the newly proposed Council size.
14. Prior to the commencement of this stage, the LGBCE has requested that the Council prepare and provide electorate forecasts, mapping and details of housing developments, and this work is currently in the process of being undertaken. Electorate forecasts will be

up to and inclusive of the year 2031 and broken down to polling district level, in line with the LGBCE's statutory duty to consider forecasts five years from the end of the review.

15. As part of this stage, the LGBCE will carry out two phases of consultation. During the initial phase the Council will be invited to present proposals for new ward boundaries. The Commission will be looking for proposals that provide the best balance of their statutory criteria, which include three main elements:
 - (a) **Delivering Electoral Equality for Local Electors** - This means ensuring that each Councillor represents roughly the same number of electors so that the value of an individual's vote is broadly the same regardless of where they live in the local authority area.
 - (b) **Interests and Identities of Local Communities** - This means establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable.
 - (c) **Effective and Convenient Local Government** - This means ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representative(s) and that the new electoral arrangements, including both the Council size decision and warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively.
16. The Commission will use the responses that it receives to this initial consultation phase to draw up draft recommendations for new ward boundaries across the Borough. The Commission will then hold a second round of consultation on those proposals during which time the Council will be able to comment on them and propose alternatives.

Council Size Submission (Stage One)

17. A cross-party working group of the four Group Leaders was established to develop the Council Size Submission, which has the benefit of input from all parties as part of that working group. The cross-party working group met on several occasions between July and September and considered the aspects outlined within the Council Size submission guidance.
18. Members of the group scrutinised the governance arrangements currently in place and gave consideration to alternative options, whilst maintaining convenient and effective governance. Members also examined the arrangements around the Council's scrutiny and regulatory functions, comparing these to the suggested requirements and to other authorities. Recognising that members represent and provide leadership to their communities in different ways, the cross-party working group developed and circulated a Members Survey to capture a sense of the time members gave to their role in Darlington. The full draft Council Size Submission is attached at **Appendix 1** for Members' consideration.
19. The working group concluded that the recommended Council size should be 41 (with a minority view of 42 Members also reflected within the submission).

20. The original timetable required that the Council should make its submission in mid-September, however following discussions with the LGBCE, an extension of time was agreed to enable members to consider the Council Size Submission at this Ordinary Meeting of the Council, with the submission date agreed as 3 October 2025. The Council will be notified of the LGBCE's decision on Council size in mid-November 2025.

PART ONE – LOCAL AUTHORITY PROFILE

Darlington Borough Council is a small unitary authority in the North-East of England. Darlington itself is a traditional market town with a historic town centre. The borough comprises a central urban area, surrounded by a larger rural area, which contains 32 villages and hamlets.

Darlington has a rich industrial heritage, which includes the initiation of the first public passenger railway in the world, and which celebrates its bicentennial in 2025. Industry still flourishes and Cummins Inc. employ some of the best engineers and scientists to build power solutions, generators and engines for cleaner power. More recently service industries have become more prominent in the town.

Darlington was previously administratively part of Durham County Council, however in 1997 Darlington obtained unitary status and is now one of five unitary authorities within the Tees Valley. Darlington covers an area of 197km² and currently has a population of 109,469, with population growth between 2012 and 2022 of 4%. Darlington has 53,426 households, with household growth between 2014 and 2024 being 9.2%, reflective of our growing town.

Ethnic diversity in Darlington is lower than the regional and national averages. As of 2021, around 101,700 Darlington residents (94.4%) were in the 'White' ethnic group in comparison to around 6000 residents being in any other ethnic group. This is higher than the Tees Valley at 92.1% and the national average is 81%. In 2021 2.8% of residents in Darlington identified as 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh'; 1.4% identified as 'Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups'; 0.9% identified as 'Other Ethnic Groups'; and 0.7% identified as 'Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African' (Source: ONS Census data).

69.5% of Darlington residents live in a household with either one or two people, with the most common household size being two people at 35.3% in 2021. The proportion of households with two people in Darlington has decreased from 35.7% in 2011 to 35.3% in 2021 (Source: 2021 Census data).

Darlington Borough Council is currently made up of 50 Councillors representing 20 wards (10 three member wards and 10 two member wards). There are currently 12 parish councils in the Borough of Darlington and 14 parish meetings. The following link provides details of the membership of our Parish Councils - [Parish councils contact details Darlington Borough Council](#)

The Council holds 'all-out' elections once every four years. Following the Local Government Elections in May 2023, the Council was left in 'no overall control', and the political balance of the Council is currently 24 Labour Councillors, 13 Conservative Councillors, 6 Green Party Councillors, 5 Independent Councillors and 2 Liberal Democrats. The 24 Labour Councillors, two Liberal Democrats and one Independent Member are currently party to an agreement and form the ruling group on the Council.

Every four years, the Council's 50 Councillors elect a Leader. The Leader appoints a Deputy Leader and appoints Members to the Cabinet.

The Mayor is elected annually by Full Council and is the “first citizen” of the Borough. In addition to chairing meetings of the Full Council, the Mayor is responsible for representing the Council at any civic functions and also undertakes fundraising activities for his/her designated charity/charities. The Council also appoints a Deputy Mayor who is authorised to chair meetings of the Full Council if the Mayor is unavailable, and will also deputise at various civic events, as and when required.

The Council has faced significant financial challenges stemming from reductions in public spending between 2010 and 2019 where the Council's budget was reduced by £46m in real terms, a 36% reduction in budget. This financial position was further compounded in the aftermath of covid as demand for services rose along with an unstable economic climate, where the country saw the cost of living increasing, high inflation, income deprivation and poverty rising. It is a challenge for everyone including the Council with a spiralling increase in cost and demand for services in particular Adult and Children's Social Care and homeless with numbers of people in temporary accommodation rising significantly over the last couple of years, all of which have a direct impact on the Council's contracted expenditure.

Over two thirds of our expenditure is on Adult and Children's social care, caring for our most vulnerable residents and children. Inflation, the National Living Wage and interest rate levels directly impact on our adult care contracts which increased by 7.93% over the last year, in addition, since the pandemic there has been a continual rise in the demand for children's care services. We are seeing more vulnerable children with increasingly complex needs requiring help and support, there has been a 50% increase in contacts from partner agencies and people concerned for a child's welfare, a 45% increase in referrals and an 11% increase in children in our care since pre-pandemic levels. These are our largest budgets, and we have a statutory requirement to provide these services, this consequently impacts on the funding available for all other Council services in particular discretionary areas which keep our town clean, vibrant and safe.

Darlington currently has the second lowest Council Tax in the North-East and as such we cannot raise sufficient income from Council Tax charges to fund the spending pressures we face, every 1% increase in Council Tax increases revenue by approximately £0.67m. Darlington has a low tax base with 44% of our properties in Band A and 79% Band A - C, this along with the Council Tax level means we generate significantly less Council Tax than some other more affluent areas. If Darlington had the average England Band D Council Tax level, we would generate an additional £8.7m per year.

Indices of Deprivation (IMD)

| INDICIES OF DEPRIVATION (IMD) | | 2015 | | 2019 | | Rank change 2015 to 2019 | | |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------|------|
| WARD RANKING (smallest is most deprived) | | 6,810 | wards | 6,799 | wards | | | |
| Area Code | Area Name | Average LSOA Rank | Ward Rank | Average LSOA Rank | Ward Rank | Better / Worse | Number | % |
| E05010412 | Bank Top & Lascelles | 6,577 | 622 | 5,287 | 427 | Worse | -195 | -31% |
| E05010413 | Brinkburn & Faverdale | 22,598 | 4,772 | 19,768 | 3,862 | Worse | -910 | -19% |
| E05010414 | Cockerton | 8,469 | 997 | 7,840 | 858 | Worse | -139 | -14% |
| E05010415 | College | 28,120 | 6,318 | 28,102 | 6,258 | Worse | -60 | -1% |
| E05010416 | Eastbourne | 10,026 | 1,339 | 9,047 | 1,107 | Worse | -232 | -17% |
| E05010417 | Harrowgate Hill | 21,702 | 4,462 | 20,521 | 4,109 | Worse | -353 | -8% |
| E05010418 | Haughton & Springfield | 13,069 | 2,031 | 11,373 | 1,618 | Worse | -413 | -20% |
| E05010419 | Heighington & Coniscliffe | 23,211 | 4,958 | 21,816 | 4,521 | Worse | -437 | -9% |
| E05010420 | Hummersknott | 29,955 | 6,640 | 29,550 | 6,561 | Worse | -79 | -1% |
| E05010421 | Hurworth | 23,372 | 5,010 | 24,554 | 5,399 | Better | 389 | 8% |
| E05010422 | Mowden | 30,608 | 6,708 | 31,327 | 6,751 | Better | 43 | 1% |
| E05010423 | North Road | 9,440 | 1,202 | 8,172 | 920 | Worse | -282 | -23% |
| E05010424 | Northgate | 4,770 | 355 | 3,810 | 246 | Worse | -109 | -31% |
| E05010425 | Park East | 5,756 | 482 | 4,969 | 378 | Worse | -104 | -22% |
| E05010426 | Park West | 22,309 | 4,669 | 22,370 | 4,702 | Better | 33 | 1% |
| E05010427 | Pierremont | 13,349 | 2,106 | 12,207 | 1,818 | Worse | -288 | -14% |
| E05010428 | Red Hall & Lingfield | 9,470 | 1,211 | 9,603 | 1,239 | Better | 28 | 2% |
| E05010429 | Sadberge & Middleton St George | 22,664 | 4,785 | 23,115 | 4,937 | Better | 152 | 3% |
| E05010430 | Stephenson | 6,385 | 589 | 4,559 | 331 | Worse | -258 | -44% |
| E05010431 | Whinfield | 18,007 | 3,308 | 16,444 | 2,879 | Worse | -429 | -13% |

Darlington is a relatively deprived area and whilst 25% of wards reflect an improvement over the last recorded period (2015 to 2019), 75% reflect a worsening picture. This deprivation brings a series of challenges such as alcohol misuse, smoking, obesity and crime and anti-social behaviour.

In Darlington, the average female life expectancy is 81.4 years, with the average male life expectancy slightly lower at 77.6 years. Average life expectancy is lower for males than females, but lowest for both in the most disadvantaged wards. In the latest three-year range from 2021-23. Using the latest three-year range figures (2021-2023), inequality in life expectancy at birth across wards is higher in females, with a variation of 15 years between the lowest and highest, whereas there is a variation of 13.3 years in males (Source: Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) – Fingertips).

Darlington's Strategic Priorities

The Council has adopted a Council Plan (2024-2027) which outlines the Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and identifies priorities for action over the next few years. It provides strategic direction to the Council and council services, defining priorities and shaping delivery; making clear what we will do and how we will do it. Our Council is focussed on ensuring everyone has the opportunity for a good job, home and social connections - the building blocks of good health. The Council are committed to making Darlington fairer and greener for everyone, building on opportunities and successes and facing up to the difficult challenges. This is an ambitious plan that we cannot deliver alone, it requires collaboration, within the council, and with the voluntary and private sectors, key stakeholders and communities, and our Councillors maintain a leading role in delivering on the Plan.

Over the previous decade inequalities across our communities have worsened. The inequality in life expectancy between the best and worst areas across Darlington is 10.6 years for women and 13 years for men. The North-East has seen the highest increase in child poverty over much of the previous decade which has restricted the chances for children to flourish. Child poverty in Darlington is 25.2%, with the inequality in child poverty across Darlington Wards being 42.6%. This means that children born in different areas of our Borough have very different life chances. There are many more examples of inequalities that result in not everyone having the same life opportunities. We face long-term challenges which need long-term commitments.

Our ambitions for Darlington are for an inclusive and sustainable economy; people living well and staying healthy; with thriving places and connected communities. This is a long-term vision and the beginning of a journey that we want to make together with our communities. At the plan's heart is our vision to be one of the best places in the UK to live, learn, work and invest - with a strong and sustainable economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all. Three core principles will shape everything we do and lead to a better quality of life in the long term. All three are important and require multi-level stakeholder and community action:

- **Addressing inequalities** – The Council believes that 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. The Council Plan commits us to developing a cross-council approach based on an in-depth understanding of inequalities and their causes, with a focus on local communities experiencing disadvantage; ensuring 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; and strengthened partnership working with key stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector, with long-term focus on opportunity and addressing the causes of inequality and short-term focus on reducing the burden of the cost of living.
- **Tackling Climate Change** - the changing climate impacts all our lives now and we know this is particularly important to our younger residents. The Council are committed to being carbon neutral by 2040, and in order to achieve this we are committed to delivering the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040; involving all parts of the Council in a cross-Council approach to sustainability and climate change; to working alongside our business community, collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero; and to work with partners, government, public and private sectors and residents for a resilient Darlington so we are able to respond and adapt to change.
- **Efficient and effective resources** - we will remain focussed on the financial sustainability of the council, ensuring good governance, and delivering the best services possible with the resources we have for our residents, communities, and businesses. Our people are our best asset and will lead a culture of collaboration, innovation and creativity, respect, delivery and

compassion, whilst maintaining a focus on continuous improvement. We are committed to delivering a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan and positive Value for Money outcome; delivering high quality governance and decision-making; reviewing and refreshing the Asset Management Plan and Procurement Strategy; building on the Capital Project Management process by introducing an enhanced ICT system to improve efficiency and effectiveness; reviewing and delivering the Workforce Strategy; maximising income through new joint venture companies, increased levels of business rates by growing the local economy and maximise grant opportunities; explore opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including on-line delivery; and continue to build strong relationships with partners, residents and communities.

PART TWO

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Council Meetings

Decisions in relation to non-Executive functions, which are not covered by the quasi-judicial committees, are taken at meetings of the Full Council. All Members are summonsed to meet as the Council, and the Mayor chairs the meetings. Six Ordinary Meetings of the Council and one Annual Meeting of the Council are scheduled at the start of each Municipal Year, however Special Meetings and Extraordinary Meetings are held when required.

The Full Council are responsible for setting the Medium-Term Financial Plan, setting the Council Tax, considering recommendations from Cabinet, changes to the Constitution and dealing with matters which are not the responsibility of Executive.

In addition to business reports, each Cabinet Member currently submits a report to each Ordinary Meeting of the Council providing an overview of the work undertaken under their Portfolio during the last cycle of meetings and Members are permitted to ask questions of the Cabinet Member on any aspect of their Portfolio.

Typically, in recent years, Ordinary Meetings of the Council taken between four to six hours. Attendance levels are high, with an average attendance during the Municipal Year 2023/24 being 89.5%, and during the Municipal Year 2024/25 being 87.6%.

Members of the Public may ask questions of Cabinet Members or Committee Chairs at meetings of the Council, and public participation in Council Meetings has increased in recent years. During the Municipal Year 2023/24, 28 questions from members of the public were submitted, with this increasing to 43 questions during the Municipal Year 2024/25.

Executive Arrangements

The Council has adopted the Leader and Cabinet model as its political management structure. At the Annual Council meeting on 25 May 2023, Councillor Steve Harker was appointed as Leader for a four-year term of office. Councillor Harker appointed

Councillor Chris McEwan as the Deputy Leader and a further six Members to form a Cabinet. Each Cabinet Member has a portfolio for which they are responsible. The current Cabinet Portfolios are as follows:

- Adults
- Children and Young People
- Economy (held by the Deputy Leader of the Council)
- Health and Housing
- Local Services
- Resources
- Stronger Communities

Full details of the Cabinet Portfolios can be found at [Part 2 - Responsibility for Functions Schedule 2.pdf](#)

Cabinet Meetings

The Cabinet Members meet monthly, and Cabinet Members have a general responsibility to ensure the effective management and delivery of services within their areas of responsibility, and within the following framework:-

- (a) the Council's overall strategic, corporate and policy objectives;
- (b) the budgets set for the services and this Council's Financial Procedure Rules; and
- (c) the Law and the Constitution.

Ordinary Meetings of the Cabinet usually take anywhere between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on the size of the Agenda. As well as Cabinet Members, the Leaders of the Opposition Groups are invitees to a meeting, sit at the table alongside Cabinet Members and hold them to account as decisions are considered.

Scheme of Delegation

The Executive has delegated some of its functions to an individual Cabinet Member and/or Officers, and these decisions are taken under the 'Scheme of Delegation to Individual Cabinet Members', or the 'Scheme of Delegation to Officers'.

Where an individual Cabinet Member is making a decision under the Scheme of Delegation to Individual Cabinet Members, the individual Cabinet Member will seek advice from relevant Officers and ensure that proper records are kept of all decisions they take, in accordance with legal requirements. Where the individual Cabinet Member has a prejudicial interest (as defined in the Members' Code of Conduct) in relation to any decision, he/she will not take that decision, but will ask the relevant Officer to refer the matter to the Cabinet for determination.

Cabinet Members also sit on several outside bodies to represent the interests of the Council.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Leader of the Council | <p>Local Government Association</p> <p>Association of Councillors – General Management Committee</p> <p>Association of Councillors – Northern Branch Committee</p> <p>Association of North-East Councils – Leaders and Elected Mayors Group</p> <p>Tees Valley Combined Authority – Cabinet</p> <p>Tees Valley Combined Authority – Transport Committee</p> <p>Association of Rail North Partnership Authorities – Rail North Ltd</p> <p>Association of Rail North Partnership Authorities – Rail North Committee</p> <p>Association of Rail North Partnership Authorities – East Coast Mainline Authorities Group</p> <p>Crown Street Library Trustee Board</p> <p>Darlington Town Centre Deal Board</p> |
| Deputy Leader and Economy | <p>Local Government Association</p> <p>Education, Employment and Skills Partnership Board</p> <p>Poor Moor Fund/Charity</p> |
| Adults | Darlington Safeguarding Partnership |
| Children and Young People | <p>Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)</p> <p>Darlington Safeguarding Partnership</p> <p>Darlington Young People's Engagement and Justice Service Board</p> <p>North-East Child Poverty Commission</p> <p>North-East Strategic Migration Partnership</p> |
| Health and Housing | <p>Association of North-East Councils – Health and Wellbeing Chairs Network</p> <p>Integrated Care Partnership Tees Valley</p> <p>North-East Ambulance Service</p> |

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| | Northern Housing Consortium |
| Local Services | <p>Association of North-East Councils – North-East Culture Partnership</p> <p>Tees Valley Combined Authority – Transport Committee</p> <p>Creative Darlington</p> <p>Darlington Railway Museum Trust</p> <p>Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Board</p> <p>Teesside International Airport Limited - Consultative Committee</p> |
| Resources | <p>Association of North-East Councils – Collaborative Procurement Sub-Committee</p> <p>Association of North-East Councils – Resources Task and Finish Review Group</p> <p>Tees Valley Combined Authority – Audit and Governance Committee</p> <p>Durham County Pension Fund Committee</p> <p>North-East Regional Employers Organisation</p> <p>North-East Regional Employers Organisation – Executive Committee</p> |
| Stronger Communities | <p>Darlington Cares</p> <p>Teesside International Airport Limited – Board</p> <p>Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London (Patrol) Adjudication Committee</p> |

Group Chief Officers Meetings

These are meetings of the ruling group at which briefing papers from Officers are presented by Chief Officers at the request of the ruling group. These meetings are chaired by (the Leader of the Council) and Cabinet Members will take a lead on reports presented within their portfolio. These meetings are usually held on a monthly basis.

Cabinet / SLT Meetings

These are joint meetings of the Council's Senior Leadership Team and the Cabinet, which are used to discuss emerging issues, to prepare the annual budget, and to develop high level Council policy and strategy. These meetings take place regularly

and are scheduled monthly, though additional meetings may be arranged at key times.

Portfolio Holder Briefings

Portfolio Holders regularly meet with Senior Officers who operate within their area of responsibility. These meetings are scheduled regularly and take place with varying regularity, from weekly to monthly.

Each Portfolio Holder has Opposition Shadow from both the Conservative and Green Groups, and the Shadow Portfolio Holders also meet and receive a briefing from Senior Officers.

Other Committee Responsibilities

Cabinet Members also sit on other Committees of the Council, as follows:

Planning Applications Committee – 1
General Licensing Committee – 1
Licensing Act 2003 Committee – 1
Members Standards Hearing Committee – 1
Human Resources Committee - 5
Human Resources Chief Officers Appointments Panel – 5
Human Resources Panel - 2

Outside Bodies and Partnership Working

The Council appoints members to a range of outside bodies. Members also sit on outside bodies as part of either their community role or specific areas of responsibility, for instance as a Cabinet Portfolio Holder. The details of all the bodies that Members are formally appointed to by the Council or the Executive can be found at [Council Report](#) and [CABINET REPORT](#)

Details of the amount of time spent by members sitting on outside bodies formed part of the questions in the Member Survey and is detailed in the summary and information in relation to the Survey at **Appendix 1**.

Tees Valley Combined Authority

The Tees Valley Combined Authority was created in April 2016, with the purpose of securing investment, creating jobs and growing the economy within the Tees Valley. The Authority is a partnership of the five local authorities within the Tees Valley – Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees, who work closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership, wider business community and other partners to make local decisions to support the growth of the economy within the Tees Valley.

The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) is made up of several statutory boards, committees and groups, with support from a team of experts in aspects of economic development. The Elected Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority is Ben

Houchen, and he chairs the Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet. The Cabinet is made up of representatives from the five Tees Valley Local Authorities and has strong engagement with the business community through the chair of the Tees Valley Business Board. Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader of the Council, sits on the TVCA Cabinet and holds the Portfolio for Transport and Infrastructure.

The TVCA has a number of other committees including the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Audit and Governance Committee, the Transport Committee, the South Tees Development Corporation Board and the Tees Valley Business Board. Councillors Haszeldine, Kane and Keir represent Darlington on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with Councillor Mandy Porter, Portfolio Holder for Resources, representing Darlington on the Audit and Governance Committee.

Councillor Stephen Harker and Councillor Libby McCollom, Portfolio Holder for Local Services, represent Darlington on the Transport Committee.

More information on the work of the TVCA can be found at [Tees Valley - Anything is Possible](#)

Combined Fire Authority

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority is responsible for setting the strategic direction, policies and priorities of the Service. In doing so it must ensure the Fire and Rescue Service has the people, equipment and training needed to carry out its duties in relation to:

- fire prevention
- fire safety
- firefighting and rescue
- road traffic collision extrication and rescue
- other emergency rescue activities, e.g. responding to flooding or terrorism

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority is a combined authority created by the Durham Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1996.

Membership comprises of 21 Elected Councillors from Durham County Council and four from Darlington. The Combined Fire Authority is a legal body with statutory duties and responsibilities. It makes sure that County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is run to the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

Members of the Combined Fire Authority will:

- Make informed decisions in relation to Service policy and strategy aligned to the Authority's vision, priorities, objectives and values.
- Approve the Service's budget and ensure they receive sufficient money from local council tax.

- Monitor the Service's performance to ensure it is efficient, effective and economical.
- Appoint the following positions:
 - Chief Fire Officer
 - Clerk to the Fire Authority
 - Deputy Chief Executive (who is also the Treasurer to the Fire Authority)
 - Deputy Chief Fire Officer
 - Directors
- Act as the final level of appeal in employee disciplinary and grievance procedures.

The governance framework for the Combined Fire Authority comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled, and its activities through which it is accountable to and engages with local communities.

Darlington is represented on the CFA by Councillors Anderson, Lee, Ray and Snedker, and Darlington has one seat on each of the following Committees - Audit and Finance Committee, Performance Committee, the Human Resources Committee, Appeals Committee, Joint Consultative Committee, and the Pension Board Committee.

More information on the Combined Fire Authority can be found at [Combined Fire Authority | County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service](#)

Police and Crime Panel

The Police and Crime Panel (PCP) scrutinises and supports the work of the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

The panel is composed of seven councillors from Durham County Council and three councillors from Darlington, plus two independent co-opted members. The panel has a number of powers and responsibilities, including to:

- review the draft police and crime plan,
- publicly scrutinise the PCC's annual report,
- review and scrutinise decisions and actions by the PCC,
- review and veto the PCC's proposed precept levels,
- review the PCC's conduct,
- review and confirm the PCC's proposed appointments of Chief Constable, Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, and
- administer complaints in relation to the handling and determination of complaints against the PCC and / or Deputy PCC.

Darlington's three representatives on the PCP are Councillor Johnson,

Councillor Lee and Councillor Kevin Nicholson.

More information about the Police and Crime Panel can be located at [Police and Crime Panel - Durham County Council](#)

ACCOUNTABILITY

Overview and Scrutiny Functions

Scrutiny in Darlington comprises a Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and five Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Schedule 3 of Part 2 of the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny Procedure Rules (see [SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES](#)) details the role of Scrutiny in Darlington.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees play a key role in developing and reviewing policy through a facility to call-in Cabinet decisions for review or by undertaking pre-decision scrutiny. They also have powers to scrutinise the activities and decisions of some partner organisations, including partners in health organisations and the Safeguarding Board.

Overview and Scrutiny is also one of the most important ways in which Councillors can champion their constituents. Any member of the public can approach a Member of the Council to ask that an issue is referred to a meeting of Scrutiny. This is referred to as a Councillor Call for Action (CCfA).

Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Memberships

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are thematically based, mainly aligning with our Cabinet Portfolios, and Darlington's current Scrutiny structure comprises:-

- Monitoring and Co-ordination Group;
- Adults Scrutiny Committee;
- Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee;
- Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee;
- Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and
- Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

The five Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees form the membership of the Monitoring and Co-ordinating Group, and there are 10 seats on each of the five Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is politically balanced. The Working Group believe that it is important to retain Overview and Scrutiny Committees of this size. Given scrutiny's role in amplifying the voices and concerns of the public, it is essential that the Committees, as far as possible, include Members that represent different areas of the Borough, including both the urban and rural areas. Smaller Committees would reduce the ability to achieve that geographical balance.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet six times per Municipal Year but may arrange Special Meetings as and when required. The average length of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting is approximately 2-3 hours

Darlington's Scrutiny Committees have a designated Scrutiny Lead Officer (Assistant Director / Head of Service), generally from the relevant service area, however this is very much a facilitating role. Overview and Scrutiny Committees do not have a dedicated Scrutiny Support Officer for the Members. The Overview and Scrutiny process is facilitated by Democratic Officers, who provide administrative support and information as required, however scrutiny in Darlington has been very much, since its inception in 2000, been seen to be 'Member-led'.

Prior to each meeting of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a pre-Agenda Meeting takes place involving the Chair, Vice-Chair, Scrutiny Lead Officer and the Democratic Officer attached to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These meetings play a key role in providing guidance and advice to Members in terms of their role as scrutineers.

Relevant Cabinet Members are invited to each meeting of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and may be invited to address the Committee at the discretion of the Chair or asked to answer questions accordingly.

Darlington is also a member of the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (comprising three Members from each of the five Tees Valley authorities) and the Joint Committee meets on a quarterly basis.

Overview and Scrutiny Workload

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees have always enjoyed wide powers to scrutinise all aspects of the Council business and have made significant contributions to key policy changes the Council has undertaken.

In terms of workload, the compilation of Work Programmes are a matter for the individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees themselves, although the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group monitor Work Programmes to ensure that the workload and impact of Scrutiny is monitored. The Monitoring and Co-ordination Group ensure Work Programmes are aligned to maximise the effectiveness of Scrutiny and ensure the greatest impact.

The Monitoring and Co-ordination Group recently introduced Annual Scrutiny Briefings, which take place between the Annual Meeting of the Council (at which the membership of Committees is agreed) and the initial meeting of the Municipal Year. The purpose of the Annual Scrutiny Briefing is to enable Members, some of whom may be new to the Committee, to receive an overview of the remit of that Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to develop an understanding of existing workloads and any work that might be forthcoming within the forthcoming twelve to eighteen months which might require Scrutiny attention, and ensure that the Key Performance Indicators reviewed by the Committee remain fit for purpose.

Members use these Annual Scrutiny Briefings to inform their decisions around developing the Work Programme for that Committee over the forthcoming Municipal Year. Members also pay due regard to the Forward Plan in order that they can input on

matters due before Cabinet.

Scrutiny Work Programme

As mentioned, each Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a Work Programme which timetables what items the Committee will receive throughout the Municipal Year. The Work Programme is formally agreed at the first meeting of the Municipal Year, however the Work Programme does appear as a standing item on the Agenda for each Ordinary Meeting.

Once agreed, Members can submit requests for an additional item to be added to the Work Programme using a Quad of Aims (**Appendix 2**).

The Chairs provide an update at each Ordinary Meeting of the Council on the work undertaken in the previous Committee cycle.

Scrutiny Activities between Formal Meetings

Members undertake a number of activities between formal meetings, mainly in the form of Task and Finish Groups.

In deciding what Scrutiny Reviews are to be undertaken, Members take the following into account:-

- Will the outcome make a difference?
- Discussions with senior management on reviews that can be undertaken to assist with the workload of the Service Group; and
- Local views and priorities (what the community would want scrutiny to get involved in to improve service delivery).

In recent years, Scrutiny Committee Members have led on some extremely in-depth Task and Finish Reviews. Members of the Adults Scrutiny Committee conducted a review into Adult Social Care during Covid (concluded in 2024), which also involved Members of the Task and Finish Review Group hosting a Hearing to hear testimony from those working in, and with, the Adult Social Care Sector during Covid. The Adults Scrutiny Committee has also recently held a review on Care Homes in Special Measures (2024).

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee also held a Task and Finish Review into the Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People and their Families (2024) and have also recently formed Task and Finish Groups to examine the Performance Indicators used in Performance Management (2024) and Childcare Sufficiency (2024).

Some Scrutiny Committee Members have also worked directly with Lead Officers, undertaking work outside of the scrutiny process to drive policy improvements, with examples including Residents Parking Zones, Road Harm Reduction and Active Travel Neighbours.

Regulatory Committees

All regulatory Committees currently have a membership of 14 Councillors, with a quorum of four Members. There is one Planning Applications Committee, and two Licensing Committees – the General Licensing Committee for general business and the Licensing Act 2003 Committee for Licensing Act 2003 responsibilities. Sub-Committees of these two Committees (five Members on the General Licensing Sub-Committee and three Members on the Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee) meet to determine individual applications or reviews.

Licensing

We have two Licensing Committees in Darlington – The General Licensing Committee and the Licensing Act 2003 Committee. The Licensing Act 2003 Committee also considers Gambling Act contested applications. The legislation is pretty specific on what can and cannot be delegated. In Darlington, the majority of business is delegated to Officers (i.e. non-contested applications etc.), or to a sub-committee of three members where the application is contested.

The General Licensing Committee sits every six weeks. If, for any reason, there is no business the meeting is cancelled. Sub-committees of the General Licensing Committee are called on an ad hoc basis and sits immediately after meetings of the General Licensing Committee, or as required. Sub-Committees of the General Licensing Committee comprise five Members and meet to determine an application for a Hackney Carriage Licence or review an application.

The Licensing Act 2003 Committee sits on an ad hoc basis and the membership replicates that of the General Licensing Committee. Generally, if required, the Licensing Act 2003 Committee sits direct after meetings of the General Licensing Committee, however, can meet as a stand-alone committee. Sub-committees of the Licensing Act 2003 Committee meet to determine and review premises licences.

During the Municipal Year 2023/24, nine General Licensing Sub-Committee meetings were held, and seven Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee meetings were held. During the year 24/25, six General Licensing Sub-Committee meetings were held, and one Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee meeting was held.

Planning

The Planning Applications Committee is a single committee of 14 Members with a quorum of four. Meetings take place every four weeks. Members on the Planning Applications Committee receive training on an annual basis, with ad hoc training sessions held where specialist or technical knowledge on an application may be required.

The workload for a Member on the Planning Applications Committee can be quite heavy as reports submitted to Committee tend to be lengthy and detailed, with further background information on each application available to Members via the Planning Portal. Approximately 92% of Planning decisions are delegated, with the remaining applications coming to the Planning Applications Committee.

Generally, attendance at a meeting of the Planning Applications Committee is at a good level, with no more than two or three Members missing per meeting. Meetings generally range from two to three hours in length, however, can continue longer if more complex applications, or a larger number of applications, appear on the agenda. A meeting will normally have approximately three or four applications on the Agenda, with standing items to discuss appeals submitted, appeal decisions and ongoing enforcement action. With longer meetings some Members may leave for other engagements, however this rarely leads to a meeting becoming inquorate.

Other Committees

The Council also has the following Committees, Panels and Working Groups:

Council Decision-Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group

A Motion agreed at the Ordinary Meeting of the Council on 28th September 2023 established the Council Decision-Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group. The purpose of the working group is to consider how Council decision-making and the scrutiny function can be strengthened, involving the public in deliberations, and making recommendations to Council thereon. The working group comprises ten Members and is politically balanced (five Labour Members, three Conservative Members, one Green Member and one Liberal Democrat), with the Members being nominated by their respective political groups.

To date, the Council Decision-Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group has met on eight occasions. In relation to Scrutiny work, sub-groups were initially established to look at the themes of:

- Work Programming;
- Meeting Format;
- Member Awareness, Engagement and Training;
- Public Engagement; and
- Officer Engagement / Resources.

As with the Overview and Scrutiny function, there is no dedicated Officer attached to this Working Group. Support and guidance is provided by the Assistant Director, Law and Governance, and the Democratic and Elections Manager, with administrative support provided by a Democratic Officer, however Members of the Working Group have undertaken their own research and evidence gathering in relation to these key themes.

Members have also considered the decision-making process at Council Meetings and public involvement in those meetings. The working group met on 16 September 2025 to draw together their final recommendations, however a further meeting is required to finalise these. It is proposed that those recommendations which require constitutional amendments will be considered by the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee in January 2026, before being forwarded to Council for consideration. The formation of this cross-party Working Group demonstrates the Council's willingness to reflect on and examine its own

governance arrangements and strengthen those arrangements, where necessary.

Climate Change Cross Party Working Group

Following the decision by the Council to declare a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 18th July 2019, a Climate Change Cross Party Working Group was established to identify ways to reduce Carbon emissions and achieve a carbon neutral status for the Borough of Darlington. The Working Group does not have decision making powers, however progress on the Council's Climate Change objectives is reported to the Ordinary Meeting of the Council on a six-monthly basis.

The remit of the Climate Change Working Group has recently expanded following the agreement of the Nature Restoration Motion by Council in May 2025.

Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Wellbeing Board brings together key local leaders to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Darlington and reduce health inequalities through:

- Developing a shared understanding of the health and wellbeing needs of its communities from pre-birth to end of life including the health inequalities within and between communities;
- Providing system leadership to secure collaboration to meet these needs more effectively;
- Having strategic influence over commissioning decisions across health, public health and social care encouraging integration where appropriate;
- Recognising the impact of the wider determinants of health on health and wellbeing.

Five elected Members are appointed to the Board, and meetings are chaired by the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing. A copy of the Terms of Reference for the Board can be found at [Terms of reference](#)

Members Standards Hearing Committee

The Council maintains a Members Standards Hearing Panel, with five Council Members and two Parish Council Members. The Committee hears complaints against Member for alleged breaches of the Code.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee has six elected Members. It has responsibility for considering the annual report of the Head of Corporate Assurance, considering individual audit reports. The annual audit letter of the external auditors and to consider a range of corporate governance issues including whistleblowing.

Human Resources Committee (including the Appointments Panel, Joint Consultative Committee and the Appeals Committee)

The main committee has eleven elected Members including positions for five Cabinet members. It deals with Member appointments (staff at deputy Chief Officer level or above) and deals with staff dismissal and grievance appeals. Sitting as the JCC it has responsibility for liaison with the trade unions.

Rights of Way Panel

The panel makes decisions in relation the modifications of the definitive map of rights of way. There are three elected Members appointed to this panel.

School Governors Appointments Committee

The Committee has responsibility for the appointment and dismissal of school governors. There are five elected Members appointed to this Committee.

Corporate Parenting Panel

All elected Members are Corporate Parents, and the Corporate Parenting Panel oversees the care, support, and security of children and young people who cannot stay at home safely. The main responsibilities of the Panel include ensuring that the Council fulfils its duties towards children looked after corporately and in partnership with other statutory agencies.

There are seven elected Members appointed to this Panel, and the Panel is chaired by the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Children and Young People.

Crown Street Library Trustee Board

Crown Street Library was opened on the 23 October 1885. The library was a great philanthropic gift to the Town by the Pease Family, and it has contributed very significantly to the education, advancement and wellbeing of the people of Darlington.

The Crown Street Library Trustees Board was established in 2020 with the aim of giving more formal recognition to the wider community. The first meeting was held on 23 October 2020 to mark the 135th Anniversary of the opening of the library. The Leader of the Council represents the Council on the Board.

Members Allowances

Each Member of the Council receives a basic allowance of £9524.30 (which is inclusive of the recently agreed local government pay award) at a cost of £476,215 to the Council's budget. In addition, Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) amount to a further £224,763.42. A copy of the Members Allowances Scheme can be found at [Part 5 -Members Allowances Scheme.pdf](#)

In accordance with the 2006 Statutory Guidance no more than 50% of Members are paid an SRA, as if we pay more than 50% the local electorate may rightly question whether this is justified. At present, 21 Members in Darlington are in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance. Any reduction in Members may necessitate further consideration by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) of the Special Responsibility Allowances.

Savings achieved directly by a reduction of Members without other changes such as a reduction in Committee Membership or changes to governance arrangements are therefore a small amount of administrative costs at the outset of the Members term and the basic allowance. The basic allowance is inclusive of Members' IT costs, which means that Members are responsible for meeting the costs of their own IT. Members are also unable to claim any additional travel and subsistence within the Borough.

Training and All-Member Briefings

At the start of each term of office, Members receive a programme of training to assist in the discharge of their duties for the next four years. This training is usually provided in-house, or by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). Recent discussions held in meetings of the Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group suggest that Members feel a little overwhelmed during this initial period, and that training opportunities should be spread out more evenly across the first year of a term of office, with further refresher training incorporated throughout the term of office.

As it currently stands, following the initial training provided, Members undertake training primarily on an ad hoc basis, however there are annual training sessions held on Equality and Diversity and the Code of Conduct. Following comments made in the meetings of the Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group, plans for a more robust training programme are currently under review and Officers have recently been linking in with Ed Hammond at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to facilitate this.

More specifically, Members of the Planning Applications Committee receive an annual training session to assist in the discharge of their responsibilities and may also receive additional training around emerging themes or changes in planning legislation to ensure that decision-making continues to be sound. Whilst our Members do already receive an annual training session, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently being considered will include a measure that all Committee Members across the planning system receive training that covers at least the key principles of planning. The objective of this measure is to ensure that where Members make planning decisions, they do so on proper planning grounds, in accordance with material considerations, justifiable and defensible.

All-Member Briefings are arranged on an ad hoc basis to address local issues or provide information to Members in terms of forthcoming decisions, or to roll out national guidance. Within the last few months all-Member Briefings have been arranged to provide Members with information about Hopetown (Darlington's latest visitor attraction), EV Charging, guidance in relation to proposed constitutional

changes, information and advice in relation to Operation Ford, and in relation to the Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF) Project.

PART THREE – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Working in the Community

Members undertake work in different ways within the community. Some Members have very active roles and are also members of Residents Associations, Community Partnerships or attend Police and Community Together (PACT) meetings. Members are involved in leading on or stimulating community projects or serving on formal bodies such as Parish Councils. Councillor Lee currently also serves as a Parish Councillor on Heighington Parish Council, however many other Councillors in rural wards attend Parish Councils meetings as non-members, or in their capacity as the Ward Councillor.

As can be seen from the results of the Members Survey (**Appendix 1**), the vast majority (84.62%) of those Members who responded produce a newsletter. Members have the option of having their newsletters printed by the Council, however all such newsletters are checked by Senior Officers before being issued, as they must remain politically neutral if produced using Council resources. Members may choose to produce and print their own newsletters, and many do so, as this provides greater autonomy in terms of what they can say, including the addition of political content.

All of those Members (100%) who responded to the Members Survey indicated that they hold Ward Surgeries. Ward Surgeries provide an opportunity for any ward resident to go and talk their local Councillor face-to-face and these take place on a regular basis. There was quite a range of responses in terms of regularity, with some respondents holding Ward Surgeries fortnightly, some on a monthly basis and others at varying frequencies. Some Members adopted a mixed approach, utilising the traditional approach of holding the Ward Surgery in a local community venue, whilst also adopting 'Street Surgeries'.

One Member contacted Officers to highlight that Members in their Ward undertook 'Street Surgeries bi-monthly, which entailed the collection and bundling of newsletters (30 mins), delivery (1 hour), and the street surgery itself (2 hours)'. This response also provided details that the Members in this ward also undertook 'action days' during lighter nights, which occurred fortnightly and lasted an hour.

It is notable that the work required to undertake 'street surgeries' can be greater than their more traditional counterparts as Members need to undertake a preparatory visit to inform residents when they will be in the area and drop of the 'Street Surgery' Stop notice to be displayed in the window, and then subsequently re-visit the area to meet and discuss matters with those residents who have indicated that they would like a visit. The benefits of 'Street Surgeries' are that residents do not have to travel to them, making them a convenient option for electors, and that Members are engaging with residents who have actively identified that they wish to be called upon.

In terms of casework, the Council does not have a case management system, so this is not formally recorded, and there is no dedicated Officer support to help Members deal with casework. Given that the size of Darlington's workforce has shrunk over

the last 15 years, Councillors are faced with seeking information and advice from a much-depleted Officer structure. Members are responsible for monitoring cases and also for resolving any issues raised with them themselves.

As part of our Members Survey, Members were invited to provide information about how many hours per week they spent on dealing with casework, including the time required to obtain information to respond to residents, with 8.70% of respondents claiming to spend 61–90 minutes on resident queries, 13.04% of respondents advising that they spent 91-120 minutes on resident queries, 21.74% of respondents stating that they spent 121-180 minutes on resident queries each week, and 13.04% of respondents informing the Working Group that they spent 181-240 minutes on resident queries each week.

Other responses received reflected the variance across Members with responses including 240-300 minutes, an average of a day per week on casework, 360 minutes, two hours per day, 400 minutes per week, 180-240 minutes but if there is a particular current issue affecting many residents it can be a lot more hours, and six hours per week.

This variance in time was reflected in the response to the question in relation to preparation for formally constituted meetings, with the majority of respondents either spending 91-120 minutes in terms of preparation, or 121-180 minutes in relation to preparation (both 21.74%). Other responses included 540-720 minutes per week, 300 minutes per week, one Member spends 2 hours per day reading and has one full day reading in preparation every 2-3 weeks (it should be noted that this Member identified as being the Vice-Chair of two Overview and Scrutiny Committees). This perhaps also highlights the amount of research Members are required to undertake themselves as there is no dedicated Overview and Scrutiny support to gather evidence and prepare and provide research and briefing papers.

All those who responded to the question in relation to social media profiles stated that they maintained a Councillor social media profile, which perhaps reflects the shift in the way members of the public expect to be able to communicate with Members. The time spent by Members engaging with residents on social media varied greatly too, with one respondent spending up to 30 minutes per week engaging with residents via social media, to those who spent between 181-240 minutes per week engaging with residents via social media.

One Member reported averaging 45 minutes per day for five days per week across the last 90 days, with another Member suggesting that “running an effective Facebook page takes eight hours plus (per week)”.

Time Spent on the undertaking the role of a Councillor in Darlington

As demonstrated from the responses to the Members Survey, it can be extremely difficult to identify an average number of hours per week that Members spend on undertaking their role as a Councillor. Variations in the type of ward that a Councillor represents will have an influence on the issues that may be raised by residents, how many co-Councillors also represent the ward and how ward work can be effectively split between them is a further consideration, alongside the number of hours that a

Member can make available due to other commitments, such as employment, family, caring issues, etc., which will all have an impact.

Indeed, one Member contacted Officers to highlight that it was difficult to capture “the hours and hours I spend talking to residents on an informal basis at village shows, events and even more so at Community meeting points such as the Grange, coffee pot, mustard tree, village hall, all the pubs, church, walking the dog, etc.”.

Another Member specifically highlighted the difference in expectations on a rural Councillor – “at village events and other meetings there is an expectation from residents that we are present. Eg. village shows, acting as a judge for children and animals, country fairs, coffee mornings, the list is endless”.

In reviewing our Members’ Allowances in November 2023, our Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) examined the latest LGA Census of Councillors (England) (2022), which demonstrated that Councillors in unitary authorities who hold no positions of responsibility spend an average of 22.8 hours per week on “Council business”. This included dealing with ward issues, community-related meetings and other associated work such as responding to e-mails, reading and preparation. It excluded group and other political party business. This equates to 148.2 days per year on an 8-hour working day.

The IRP felt that Members in Darlington were typical of the average and adopted 148.2 days per year as the time expectation to recalibrate the Basic Allowance.

Political Group Work

Darlington does not have any political advisors as some authorities do, and therefore all research in relation to group proposals is conducted by Members themselves. Members do receive basic administrative support from Democratic Services in terms of the preparation of Motions at meetings, and Members will receive support in the development of policy and strategies from appropriate Officers, however in terms of political or strategic direction, Members are required to take a strong lead.

PART FOUR - SUMMARY

The Council’s submission has been developed by a cross-party Working Group comprised of all four of the Group Leaders on the Council, and which has been informed by evidence about current activity levels, and contributions from Members through a Member Survey. The Group Leaders have reviewed and challenged the existing governance arrangements and have also considered alternative arrangements, and the narrative and reflections are outlined within this section of the submission.

From the outset, the Working Group recognised and acknowledged that Darlington was a significant outlier in terms of over-representation and were very keen that due and serious consideration was given, and seen to have been given, to this submission.

Members of the Working Group expressed the wish to submit a proposal to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England that did take into consideration the

current position, however provided realistic consideration of Darlington's position, both in terms of remaining faithful to the need for good governance and one which continued to meet the challenges faced by the Council and the residents of Darlington.

The Working Group allowed for a robust consultation process and ensured that the views from all political groups were sought and taken into consideration within this submission, meeting on six occasions between July and September. The Council welcomed the opportunity to consider its size, and this proposal was considered at an Ordinary Meeting of the Full Council on 2 October 2025.

Governance Arrangements and Accountability

The Council's governance arrangements are typical of the arrangements of many other Councils and have no outstanding features. Cabinet is currently two short of the legal maximum size of ten, though the Council's own Constitution does cap the size of Cabinet to a maximum of nine. Cabinet members attend many meetings in addition to formal Cabinet meetings and spend time sitting on outside bodies as part of their Portfolio responsibilities. Given that Cabinet is currently operating at less than the maximum permitted size and taking into consideration the amount of time Cabinet Members spend sitting on and supporting outside bodies such as the Tees Valley Combined Authority, to reduce the size of Cabinet would invariably increase the time requirements on those fewer Portfolio Holders.

The current Cabinet membership comprises five male and three female Members, with four Members currently employed externally in some capacity. The ages of Cabinet Members range from early thirties to early sixties. A reduction in the size of Cabinet, and the increased time requirement placed on those fewer Cabinet Members, may subsequently make taking on such a role prohibitive to some resulting in a less diverse Cabinet membership.

Likewise, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements are not too dissimilar, or out of step with, other authorities. Whilst it is recognised that some Councils do have a smaller number of larger Overview and Scrutiny Committees, many within the immediate region have a similar number of thematically based Overview and Scrutiny Committees (**Appendix 3 – Scrutiny Structures in the North-East (Sept 2024)**), and Members were satisfied that this arrangement currently works well in Darlington and aligns well with the current Portfolio allocation. The scoping exercise at Appendix 3 also demonstrates that many North-East authorities have dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Teams or Officers, which Darlington does not have,

The size of Darlington's Scrutiny Committees is also not out of step with the guidance provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), who hold the view that committees work best when they number between 9 and 13 Members ([Structures, resources and formal powers - a practice guide - CFGS](#)).

Darlington allocate ten seats per Scrutiny Committee, so our number of seats already sits at the lower end of this suggested range. The CfGS state that this is not a rigorously scientific conclusion, more a figure that reflects:

- The purpose of scrutiny as a space in which Members are coming together to discuss matters of common interest, and the need therefore to ensure a decent spread and plurality of views and perspectives;
- The need for political proportionality, especially in councils with several political groups and/or a lot of independent Members;
- The logistical unwieldiness of particularly large groups – and difficulties in ensuring the full engagement of those larger groups.

Darlington is a Council which already has four political groups represented on the Council, and five Independent Members. Results in recent local elections in the immediate locality suggest that a further political group may gain seats at the next local elections, and therefore the argument to be able to accommodate political proportionality also becomes even greater.

Given the ongoing work of the Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group in terms of reviewing and strengthening our Overview and Scrutiny function, the Working Group were also reluctant to make any changes to the Overview and Scrutiny structure at this time.

When examining the membership of the regulatory committees, the Working Group noted that the Planning Advisory Service's (PAS) 'Modernising Planning Committees National Survey 2025' (<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/applications/planning-committee/modernising-planning-committees-national-survey-2025>) reflected that 75% of respondents had:

- A single Planning Committee made up of 9-12 members
- Planning Committee is held once a month
- The agenda is 4 or less items
- The meeting last 3 hours or less
- A delegation rate of over 90%

Darlington is very similar to most respondents in this survey in having a single Planning Applications Committee, with meetings once every four weeks and a delegation rate of 92%. Meetings will usually have three or four items on the Agenda and last between two and three hours. The only area in which Darlington slightly differs is in having 14 Members on our Planning Applications Committee, and the Working Group acknowledged that there may be scope for a reduction of Members on this Committee.

In terms of the Licensing function, each Licensing Authority must establish a Licensing Committee consisting of at least 10 but no more than 15 Members of the authority. Again, whilst not out of step with the requirements placed upon the authority, Members recognised that there may be scope for a reduction from the current number of 14 on this Committee.

Capacity

As mentioned at the start of this submission, Darlington is a small unitary authority and one which does not have the resources of some of its regional counterparts. Whilst we feel that the Council punches well above its weight, this is not without challenge and a reliance on Members to provide strong strategic governance whilst also being active leaders and enablers within their own local communities.

Like many local authorities, the workforce at the Council has reduced significantly over the last 15 years, which has meant that the support available to Members has been steadily reducing as well. As has been demonstrated throughout this submission, Members in Darlington receive little dedicated Officer support in comparison to other authorities in the region. Members are responsible for the management of their own casework, with no casework system in place to assist them, and no dedicated Officer support to help manage this workload. Members are required to liaise with Officers at a service level to obtain information and responses on behalf of residents and communicate these back, or signpost members of the public accordingly themselves.

Darlington does not have any dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Officers. Our Overview and Scrutiny Committees are supported by Democratic Officers, who also perform other roles, and only provide support in terms of meeting management. Many other authorities within the region have dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Officers whose role it is to conduct research, gather evidence, give policy advice, produce briefing papers and reports and provide administrative assistance to the individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and those Members. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in Darlington are required to conduct their own research, gather their own evidence seek out policy advice and guidance and produce their own reports.

Given the recent aspiration to improve the Overview and Scrutiny process in Darlington through the work of the Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Process Working Group, and considering the lack of any further meaningful resource or Officer support with which to undertake this, the onus will inevitably fall on Members, alongside the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, to drive the changes required to strengthen the Overview and Scrutiny function.

Community Leadership

The representational role of Members and their position as community leaders within their Wards has always been considered important in Darlington, with Members evidently reaching out and engaging with residents as demonstrated by the production of Ward Newsletters, holding Ward Surgeries and Street Surgeries. Since the last review there has been a significant increase on the reliance of social media for engagement and the distribution of information, with resident expectations greater in terms of the immediacy of response.

There has been a long-standing shift towards Members becoming enablers within their communities, helping to identify needs, develop solutions and deliver required

outcomes to meet the specific needs of their communities. Many Members are involved in specific projects within their Wards, leading and driving on community initiatives, especially within those Wards where deprivation is high and the needs are greatest. Members have leading roles volunteering at food banks, within 'Friends' groups ('Friends of the Denes', 'Friends of the South Park', etc.), and in the Cockerton Business Group, for example.

Members regularly attend Community Partnership meetings, Police and Community Together (PACT) meetings and Residents Association meetings. Those who represent rural Wards serve as Parish Councillors or attend Parish Council meetings and regularly take part in Parish events. The focus on Members being visible within their wards immense.

Continuity

All Group Leaders were keen that the new Council Size figure was not seen to be prohibitive to the future composition of the Council. The members of the Working Group were cognizant of the existing demands on Member time, both in terms of governance commitments and within their communities, and expressed concerns that a large reduction in terms of Council Size might result in those with other commitments or concerns, such as employment, family commitments, caring commitments, health conditions, low income, disability, etc. feeling that they would be unable to commit the time and stand for election. This would potentially result in a very narrow field of candidates standing for election – ie. those with free time and of independent means – and that the Council would consequently lack diversity.

Financial Savings

Members of the Working Group were keen that a reduction in Council Size was not purely seen as an opportunity to achieve savings. Indeed, the savings that would be achieved by a reduction in Council Size would only reflect a reduction in the number of basic allowances payable, which would be limited without a corresponding reduction in Special Responsibility Allowances. Likewise, the cost of administration would not be reduced due to a reduction in Council Size unless there was a corresponding reduction in the number of committees, committee size and membership. As Darlington currently operates well within the suggested guidance for the size of the Executive and the Scrutiny function, and as there is no desire from all the Group Leaders to change this structure, the potential to realise financial savings are limited, and this is not considered to be a significant factor in determining Council Size.

Council Size

Members of the Working Group were invited to consider options.

Increased Council Size

The Working Group recognised from the outset that Darlington represented a significant outlier in terms of over-representation, and if the decision on Council Size was purely based on the 'councillor to electors' ratio alone the requirement would be for a large reduction in Council Size.

Whilst not directly linked to Council Size, there is also a recognition Darlington is currently facing a financially challenging period, and an increase in Councillors would not seem appropriate in such circumstances and Members remained conscious of public perception. It was therefore suggested that the Council Size proposal be no greater than the current number of Members, and therefore to upper limit of any consideration should be 50 Members.

Large Reduction

After consideration, all Members of the Working Group agreed that they did not wish to see a large reduction to the number of Members. The Working Group considered a Council Size in the low thirties. Having agreed that they were minded to retain the current Executive and Scrutiny structures on the basis that they felt that it provided the best governance for Darlington, this would mean that the remaining 'backbench' Members would need to serve on an increased number of committees each.

By way of an example, a reduction to a Council Size of 33 Members, less 8 Cabinet Members, would leave 25 Members to take 50 Overview and Scrutiny Committee seats, and whilst that might imply an average of two Scrutiny Committees per Member, in reality this would not necessarily be the case due to the political balance arrangements on our counting committees. Some Members of the ruling group may be required to sit on at least three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee then also sitting on the Monitoring and Co-Ordination Committee.

Even if the Group Leaders considered a reduction in the size of the Executive to six Members, at such a reduced level this would not make a significant difference to the additional workload that would be imposed upon the 'backbench' Members but may significantly impact the workload of the fewer Cabinet Members.

Whilst Cabinet Members may sit on regulatory committees, this has always been limited in Darlington with Members keen to avoid the perception that Cabinet has undue influence over the regulatory committees. In Darlington there is currently only one Cabinet Member sitting on the Planning Applications Committee, one Cabinet Member sitting on the General Licensing Committee and only one Cabinet Member sitting on the Members Standards Hearing Panel.

This would mean that the vast majority of those 'backbench' Members who would be required to sit on multiple Overview and Scrutiny Committees would also be required to sit on the politically-balanced regulatory committees, in addition to the many other Committees which would also require representation. The Working Group concluded that there would be insufficient capacity at this figure to attend the regulatory committees and carry out other Council governance effectively.

The Working Group also raised concerns about reducing the size of the regulatory committees too greatly, as if Members had an interest in a planning application or a licensing application, for example, they may be required to recuse themselves from the meeting, and should attendance not be high, this may comprise the ability to successfully fulfil the ability to make decisions.

The Working Group examined the time spent by Members within their wards and recognised that this is a significant aspect of the role, and the Working Group expressed grave concerns that a large reduction in Council Size would reduce the ability of individual Members to serve their communities at a time when demand for support is high.

A huge concern to the Group Leaders was that should a large reduction be made, not only would there be a real threat to the good governance that currently exists in Darlington and the extensive work undertaken by Members within their communities, but the opportunity to rectify any large reduction would be extremely limited, with the next review not being scheduled for a further 12-16 years. The Working Group were aware of authorities who had seen extensive reductions in Members at previous Electoral Reviews, who were now increasing Members at subsequent Electoral Reviews, and wished to avoid such a scenario.

To provide the viable good governance that the structure in Darlington required, and to ensure that there was minimal drop-off in the work undertaken by Members within their local communities, the Working Group concluded that a more measured reduction was required, and consideration started to coalesce around a Council Size in the lower forties, which, whilst not the large reduction referenced above, the Working Group felt would still represent a significant reduction in Members. Discussion focused on a suggested Council Size within the range of 41 Members to 43 Members.

Discussions took place on figures at both ends of the range, and the suggested merits of an odd number over an even number in terms of future governance. Group Leaders were split as to whether an odd number was preferable to an even number.

The Labour and Conservative Group Leaders agreed that a proposed figure of 41 Members would enable the Members of Darlington Borough Council to continue to provide convenient and effective strategic leadership and governance within a structure that the Group Leaders had already agreed worked successfully in Darlington and was not out of step with its statistical neighbours.

They felt that this figure would enable sufficient capacity for the Council to maintain its accountability arrangements, without compromising the ongoing work being undertaken to strengthen its scrutiny and decision-making function. A proposed Council Size of 41 Members would allow for an Executive of eight Members whilst still maintaining sufficient capacity to enable the Council to discharge its scrutiny and regulatory functions effectively.

There was a consensus that a figure lower than this might negatively impact both the governance function, and concerns were expressed that the ability of Members to undertake their Community Leadership role to the same extent that they currently do would be compromised.

The Group Leader of the Green Group proposed a Council Size of 42 Members, on behalf of his Group.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group has indicated that she would welcome an odd number in the lower forties.

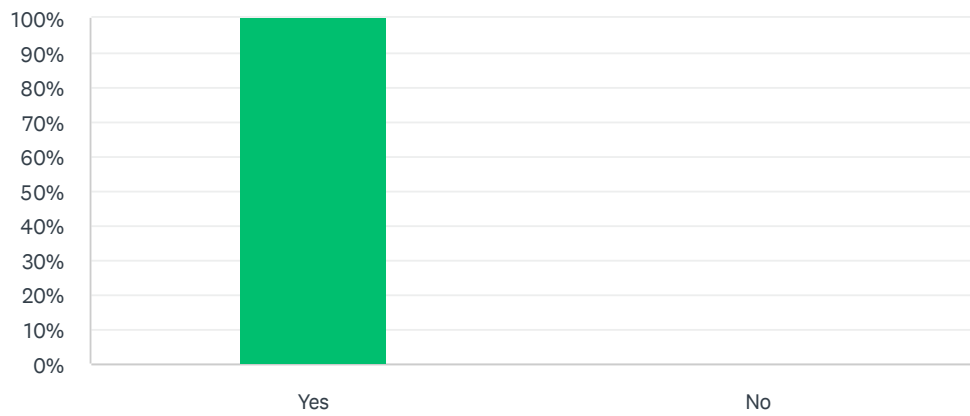
It was felt that a Council Size proposal of 41 Members represented a significant reduction to the existing membership (18%), and this was the view that the majority of the Group Leader's wished to submit to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as the Council's position. A Council Size of 41 Members was proposed and endorsed by Members at an Ordinary Meeting of the Council on Thursday, 2nd October 2025.

The Council further agreed that that a minority view representing the Green Group's proposed Council Size of 42 Members be included within the submission, which it was felt also constituted a significant reduction to the existing membership (16%).

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Q1 Do you hold ward surgeries?

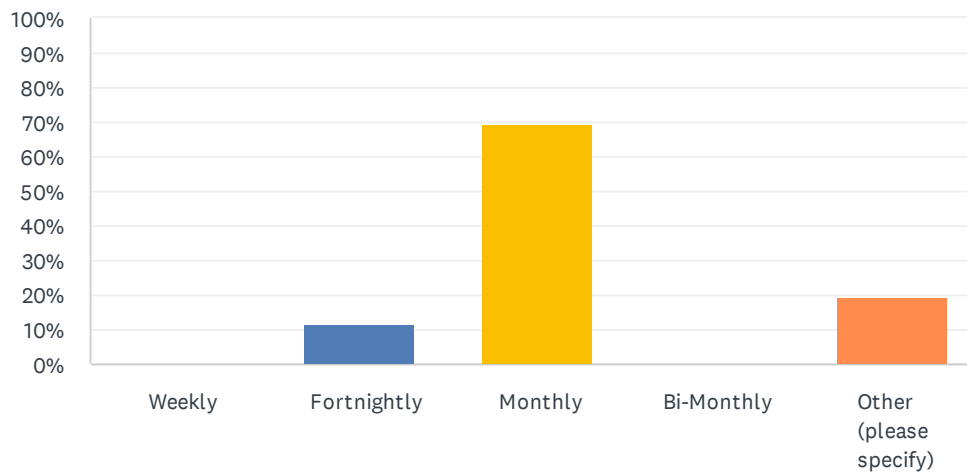
Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 100.00% | 26 |
| No | 0.00% | 0 |
| TOTAL | | 26 |

Q2 How often are the ward surgeries held?

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0

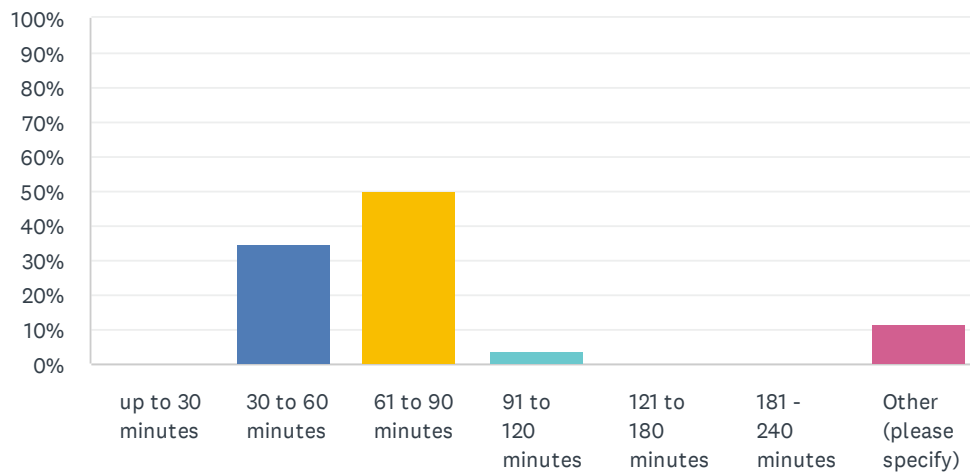


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|----|
| Weekly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Fortnightly | 11.54% | 3 |
| Monthly | 69.23% | 18 |
| Bi-Monthly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Other (please specify) | 19.23% | 5 |
| TOTAL | | 26 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 10 'static' ward surgeries per year, held at Federation of Abbey Schools. 6 'mobile' street surgeries per year in the streets and on the doorsteps around the ward. | 8/25/2025 3:26 PM |
| 2 | as often as residents like | 8/23/2025 10:53 AM |
| 3 | Monthly in person at Salutation Rd Hall, bi-monthly calling at residents' homes over 2 routes of 10 in Hummersknott | 8/22/2025 12:01 PM |
| 4 | Monthly supermarket surgeries and on average monthly surgeries as well at our local food bank. | 8/22/2025 11:30 AM |
| 5 | Monthly but at 2 separate locations within the Ward | 8/6/2025 7:58 PM |

Q3 On average how much time do the ward surgeries generally last?

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0

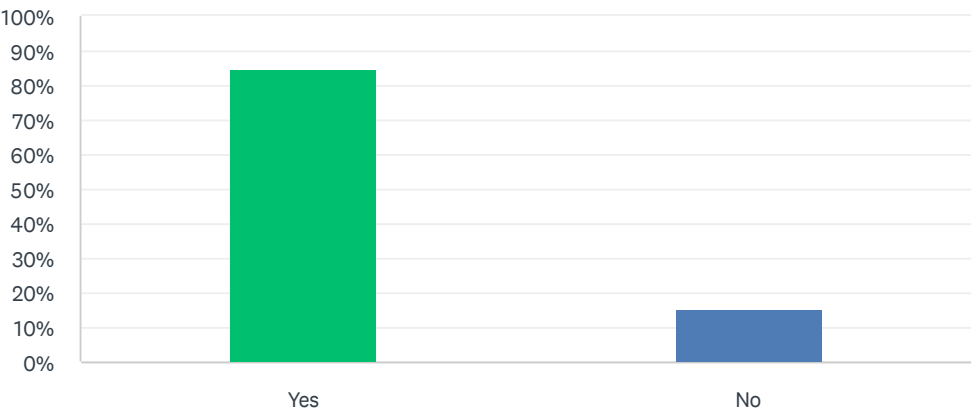


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 34.62% 9 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 50.00% 13 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 3.85% 1 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| Other (please specify) | 11.54% 3 |
| TOTAL | 26 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | The static surgeries last one hour with 10 minutes travel there and back. The mobile ward surgeries last at least 2 hours with 15 minute travel there and back - plus two hours to deliver the letters the week prior. plus 10 minutes creating the letters, plus 15 minutes travel time there and back to the town hall to collect the letters. Per year 800 minutes static surgery, 2,040 minutes mobile surgery. Total time spent on surgeries per year 2,840 minutes. | 8/25/2025 3:26 PM |
| 2 | MONTHLY ONES ONE HOUR; CALLING AT RESIDENTS' HOMES ANYWHERE BETWEEN 90 AND 180 MINS DEPENDING ON NUMBER REQUESTING A VISIT | 8/22/2025 12:01 PM |
| 3 | variable according to issues | 8/7/2025 9:54 AM |

Q4 Do you produce a newsletter?

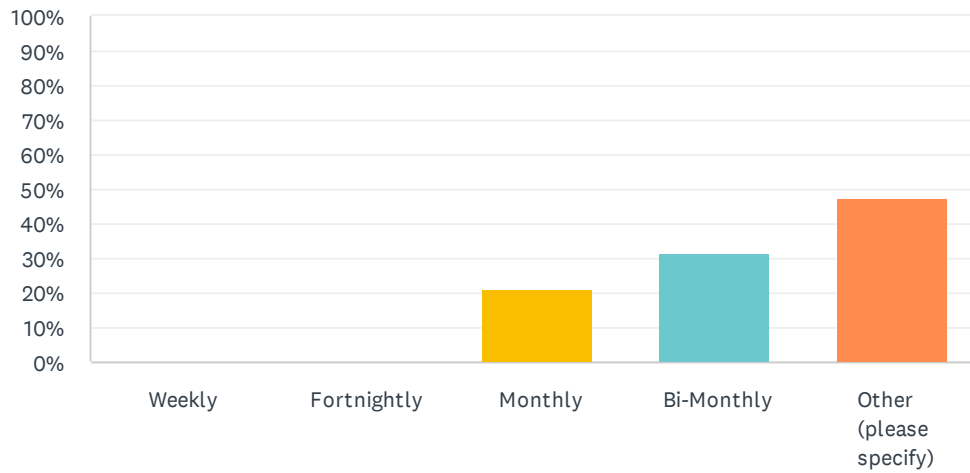
Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 84.62% | 22 |
| No | 15.38% | 4 |
| TOTAL | | 26 |

Q5 How often is the newsletter produced?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 7

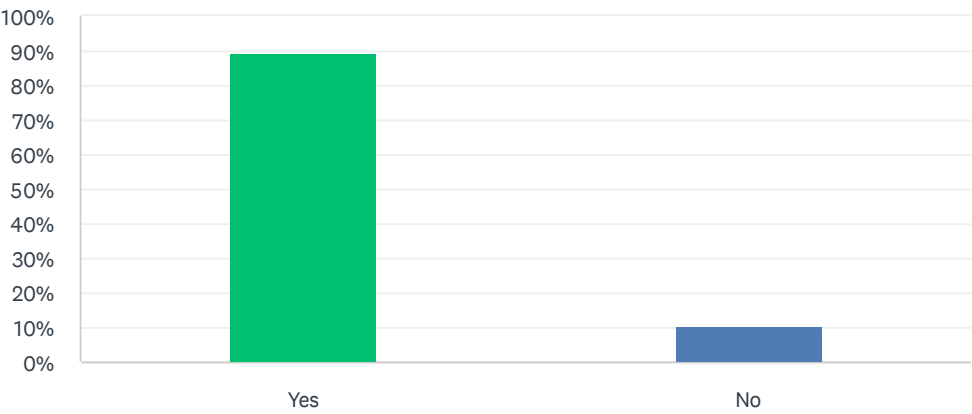


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Weekly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Fortnightly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Monthly | 21.05% | 4 |
| Bi-Monthly | 31.58% | 6 |
| Other (please specify) | 47.37% | 9 |
| TOTAL | | 19 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 3 times a year | 8/25/2025 11:17 PM |
| 2 | 3-4 x p.a + ad hoc targeted leaflets/letters | 8/23/2025 2:29 PM |
| 3 | quarterly | 8/22/2025 3:20 PM |
| 4 | ALL ROUTES IN WARD BI-MONTHLY; ALSO BI-MONTHLY SURGERY LETTER DELIVERED TO TWO WARD ROUTES THE WEEKEND BEFORE MY VISIT TO VISIT REQUESTING RESIDENCES | 8/22/2025 12:07 PM |
| 5 | Two yearly | 8/22/2025 11:45 AM |
| 6 | On average 4 times a year. | 8/22/2025 11:31 AM |
| 7 | between 2 and 4 times a year | 8/14/2025 5:06 PM |
| 8 | Seasonally | 8/6/2025 6:49 PM |
| 9 | Quarterly | 8/6/2025 4:36 PM |

Q6 Do you deliver the newsletter yourself?

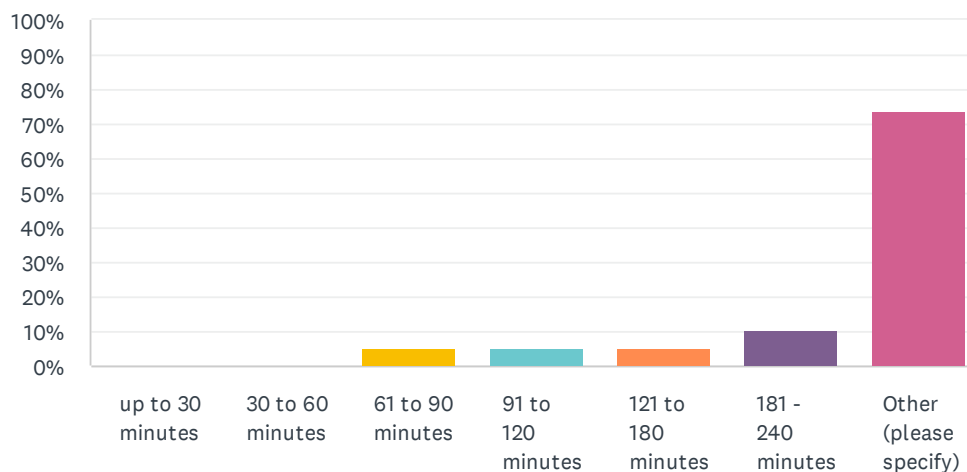
Answered: 19 Skipped: 7



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 89.47% | 17 |
| No | 10.53% | 2 |
| TOTAL | | 19 |

Q7 How much time does it take to deliver the newsletter?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 7



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 0.00% | 0 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 0.00% | 0 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 5.26% | 1 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 5.26% | 1 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 5.26% | 1 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 10.53% | 2 |
| Other (please specify) | 73.68% | 14 |
| TOTAL | | 19 |

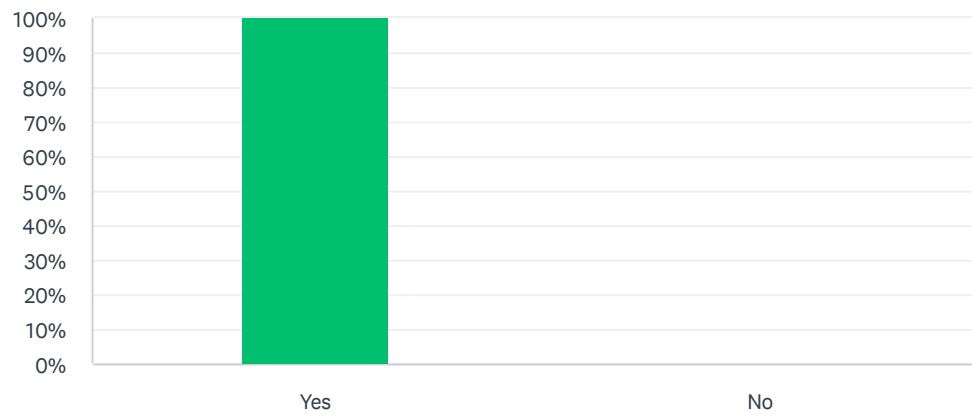
| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|--|--------------------|
| 1 | Delivered to whole ward; 4-5 hours for each ward cllr | 8/25/2025 11:17 PM |
| 2 | We have help from volunteers, but my personal contribution including collection and bundling is 4 hours. | 8/25/2025 8:22 PM |
| 3 | Production of the newsletter takes 120 minutes per edition. Delivery of the newsletter is shared with fellow ward councillor and local party volunteers. I spend 120 minutes on delivery with 10 minutes travel there and back. Per year time spent on newsletters, 1,560 minutes. | 8/25/2025 3:29 PM |
| 4 | 4-5 hours for each of the 3 councillors | 8/23/2025 2:29 PM |
| 5 | as long as it takes | 8/23/2025 10:56 AM |
| 6 | Hard to say as it's a team effort and I can't help because of my disability | 8/22/2025 3:20 PM |
| 7 | SOMETIMES I DELIVER A ROUTE MYSELF, BUT MAINLY WITH HELP FROM VOLUNTEERS. EACH ROUTE OF TEN ROUTES TAKES APPROX 120-150 MINS | 8/22/2025 12:07 PM |
| 8 | 4 days | 8/22/2025 11:45 AM |
| 9 | Probably for my share of the leaflets 6 - 8 hours. | 8/22/2025 11:31 AM |

Members' Survey – Electoral Review (Council Size Submission)

| | | |
|----|---|--------------------|
| 10 | 2 days of approx 5 hours each | 8/14/2025 5:06 PM |
| 11 | 720 minutes | 8/12/2025 12:27 PM |
| 12 | 360 | 8/12/2025 12:26 PM |
| 13 | Around 2 days | 8/6/2025 6:49 PM |
| 14 | If you can get a leaflet delivered in less than 240 minutes to any ward in the town you ought to be revealing to the world your super powers. | 8/6/2025 4:36 PM |

Q8 Do you maintain a Councillor social media profile?

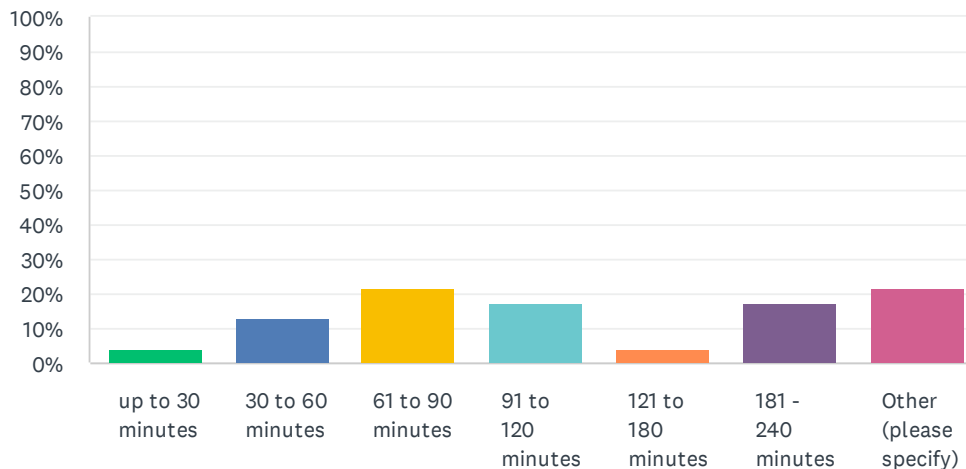
Answered: 23 Skipped: 3



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 100.00% | 23 |
| No | 0.00% | 0 |
| TOTAL | | 23 |

Q9 On average how much time per week do you spend engaging with residents on social media?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 3

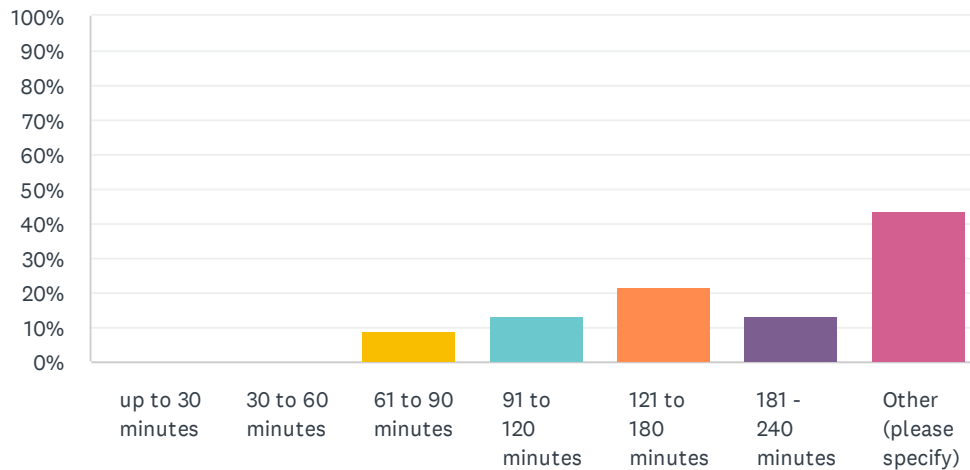


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 4.35% 1 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 13.04% 3 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 21.74% 5 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 17.39% 4 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 4.35% 1 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 17.39% 4 |
| Other (please specify) | 21.74% 5 |
| TOTAL | 23 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Averages taken over the last 90 days social media interaction = 45 minutes per day, 5 days per week, 48 weeks a year. Social media is shared with my fellow ward councillor. Over the year 10,800 minutes are spent on social media work. | 8/25/2025 3:39 PM |
| 2 | I'm partially sighted so rely on colleagues to manage soc media contact. I engage daily with residents via email text phone & in person | 8/23/2025 2:31 PM |
| 3 | impossible to say as it depends on responses from residents | 8/22/2025 3:20 PM |
| 4 | My primary engagement is via email, in person, at people's homes or at Ward Surgery. Social Media is not a suitable confidential space on which to deal with ward business | 8/11/2025 7:10 PM |
| 5 | Running an effective Facebook page of which only 3 wards do takes 8 hours plus | 8/6/2025 4:37 PM |

Q10 On average how much time per week do you spend dealing with enquiries from residents, including the time required to obtain information to respond to residents?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 3



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 0.00% | 0 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 0.00% | 0 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 8.70% | 2 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 13.04% | 3 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 21.74% | 5 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 13.04% | 3 |
| Other (please specify) | 43.48% | 10 |
| TOTAL | | 23 |

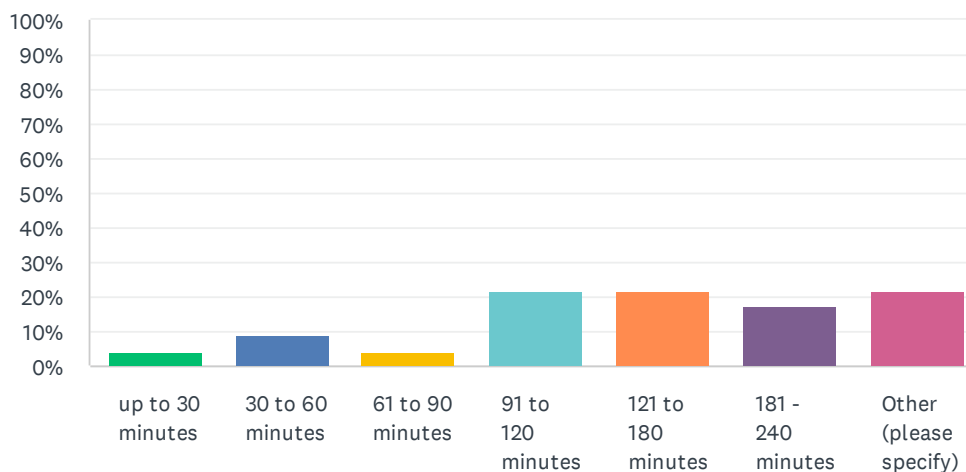
| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 240 - 300 mins | 8/25/2025 11:18 PM |
| 2 | An average of a day a week on casework, including visiting residents and problems and researching and emailing officers about a problem. | 8/25/2025 8:23 PM |
| 3 | 360 minutes | 8/25/2025 4:33 PM |
| 4 | Two hours per day are spent on residents' casework. A large part of the work is related to chasing for information (sometimes several times). Another part of the work is finding out if the casework has been resolved without having been informed. Over the year 28,800 minutes are spent on casework. | 8/25/2025 3:42 PM |
| 5 | 400 | 8/22/2025 4:01 PM |
| 6 | Impossible to say as it varies from week to week | 8/22/2025 3:20 PM |
| 7 | Usually at the very least the maximum specified above, 180-240, but if there is a particular current issue affecting many residents it can be a lot more hours | 8/22/2025 12:12 PM |

Members' Survey – Electoral Review (Council Size Submission)

| | | |
|----|-------------|--------------------|
| 8 | 360 minutes | 8/12/2025 12:37 PM |
| 9 | 360 | 8/12/2025 12:36 PM |
| 10 | 6 hrs | 8/6/2025 6:50 PM |

Q11 On average how much time per week do you spend on preparing for formally constituted meetings?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 3

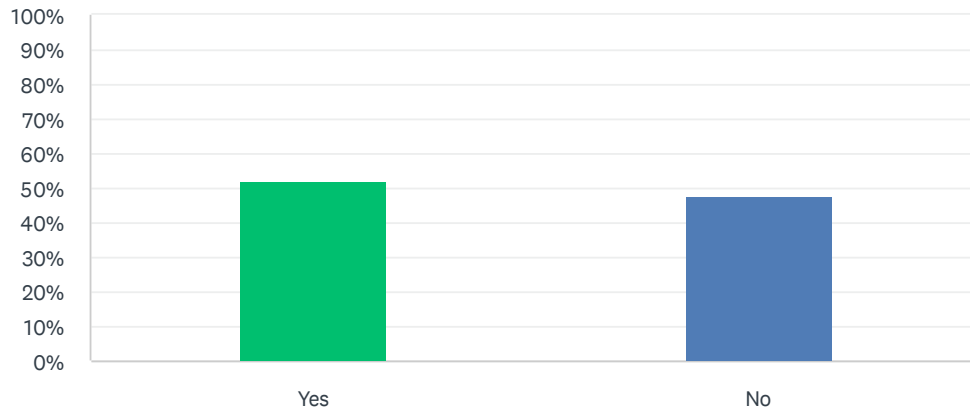


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 4.35% 1 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 8.70% 2 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 4.35% 1 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 21.74% 5 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 21.74% 5 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 17.39% 4 |
| Other (please specify) | 21.74% 5 |
| TOTAL | 23 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|--|--------------------|
| 1 | 540-720mins | 8/25/2025 11:18 PM |
| 2 | Combining the time preparing, traveling, and attending all committees (Council, Cabinet, CLS, CCWG, CDM&SPWG) annual total time spent is 11,430 minutes. | 8/25/2025 4:02 PM |
| 3 | I spend atleast 2 hrs per day & have full days reading in prep for particular panels eg: Fostering Panel , Tees Valley Jt Health Scrutiny & cttees I'm V.Ch of H&H + CYP. These cttees/panels rotate but I do atleast 1 full day's reading every 2-3 weeks | 8/23/2025 2:38 PM |
| 4 | 300 | 8/22/2025 4:01 PM |
| 5 | More than that. Some of the meetings require days of preparation and the voice navigation software I use makes it quite laborious to annotate documents | 8/22/2025 3:22 PM |

Q12 In your capacity as Councillor, are you appointed to sit on any outside bodies as a representative of the Council?

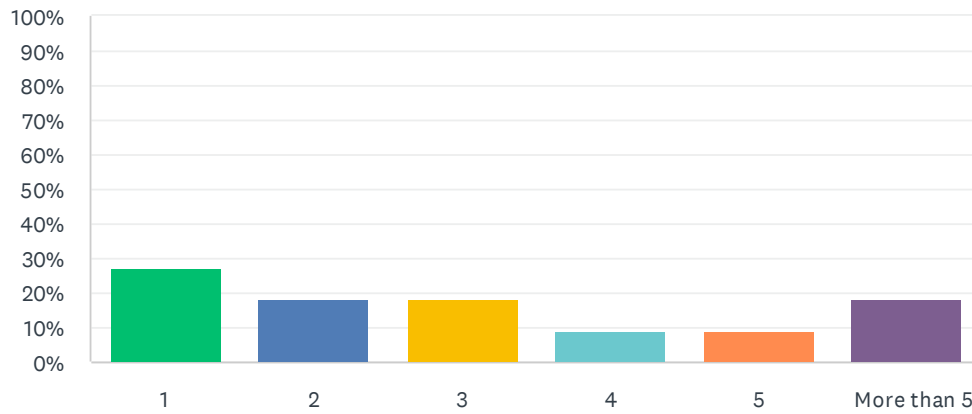
Answered: 23 Skipped: 3



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 52.17% | 12 |
| No | 47.83% | 11 |
| TOTAL | | 23 |

Q13 How many of these outside bodies do you attend?

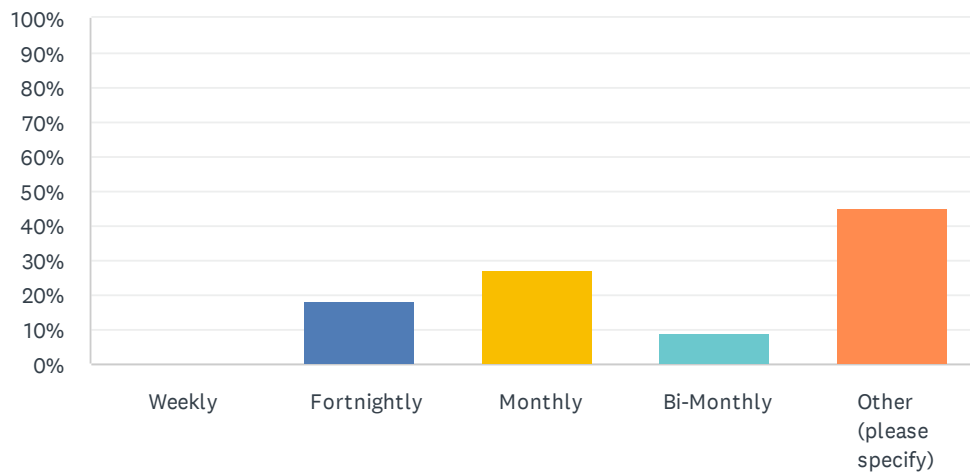
Answered: 11 Skipped: 15



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| 1 | 27.27% | 3 |
| 2 | 18.18% | 2 |
| 3 | 18.18% | 2 |
| 4 | 9.09% | 1 |
| 5 | 9.09% | 1 |
| More than 5 | 18.18% | 2 |
| TOTAL | | 11 |

Q14 How often do you attend these outside bodies?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 15

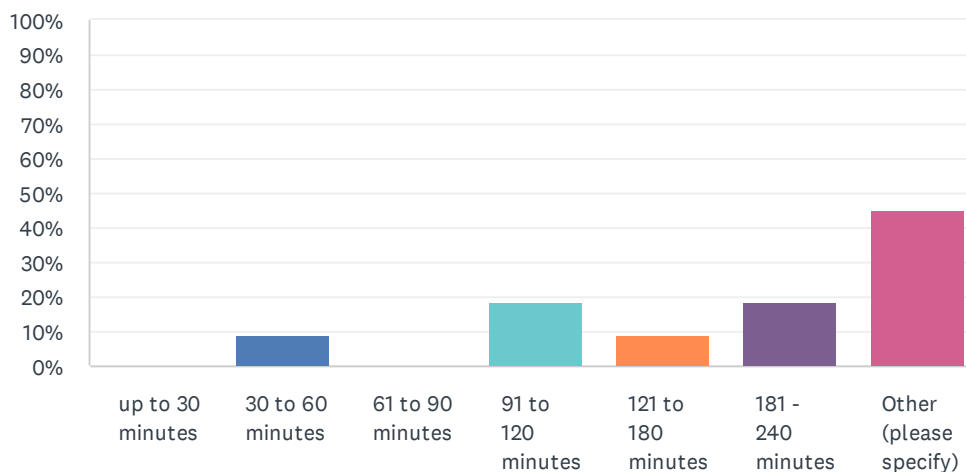


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Weekly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Fortnightly | 18.18% | 2 |
| Monthly | 27.27% | 3 |
| Bi-Monthly | 9.09% | 1 |
| Other (please specify) | 45.45% | 5 |
| TOTAL | | 11 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|-------------------|
| 1 | varies | 8/25/2025 4:02 PM |
| 2 | Each varies in regularity but I attend approx 2-3 per month | 8/23/2025 2:48 PM |
| 3 | They vary - monthly, bi-monthly and quarterly | 8/11/2025 7:12 PM |
| 4 | Quarterly | 8/10/2025 9:38 AM |
| 5 | Rarely as a reserve on the TVCA combined cttee | 8/6/2025 8:02 PM |

Q15 On average how much time do you commit to these outside bodies when you attend?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 15

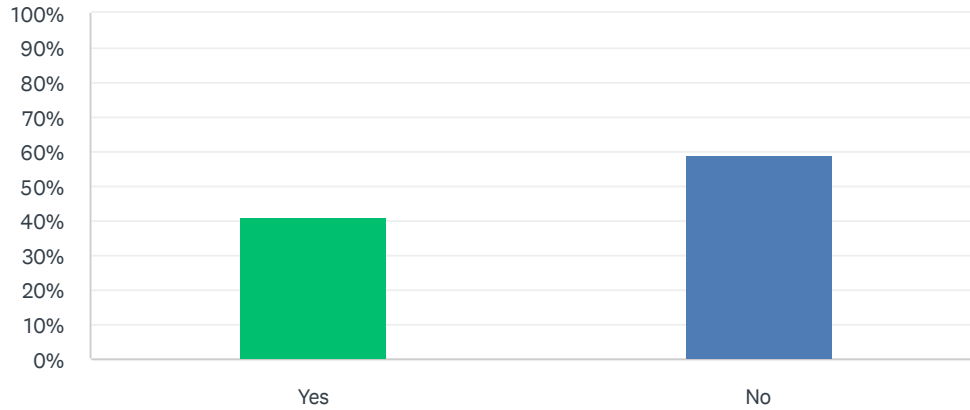


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 9.09% 1 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 18.18% 2 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 9.09% 1 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 18.18% 2 |
| Other (please specify) | 45.45% 5 |
| TOTAL | 11 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | Combining preparation, traveling and attending the meetings, per year a total of 8,100 minutes are given to these outside bodies. | 8/25/2025 4:02 PM |
| 2 | Several are half or full day meetings & are often several hours travelling away from D'ton. I spend 12-15 hrs pcm attending such meetings | 8/23/2025 2:48 PM |
| 3 | 600 | 8/12/2025 12:47 PM |
| 4 | 360 | 8/12/2025 12:47 PM |
| 5 | Haven't been required other than training. | 8/6/2025 8:02 PM |

Q16 Do you sit on any other outside bodies in your capacity as a Councillor?

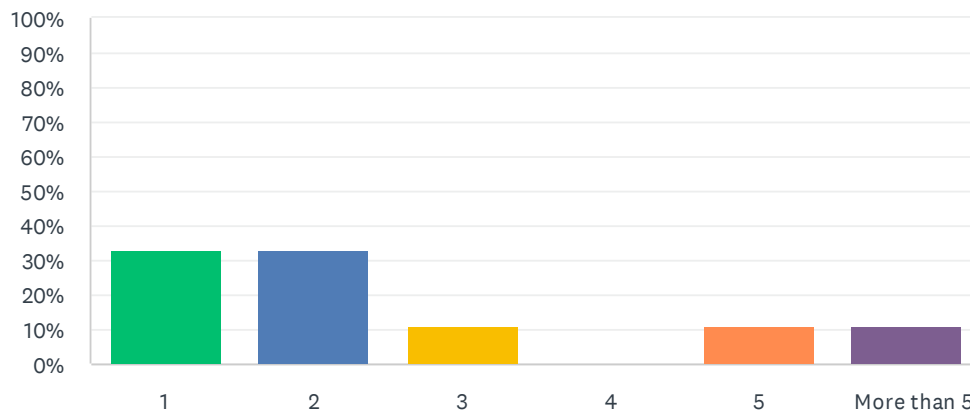
Answered: 22 Skipped: 4



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 40.91% | 9 |
| No | 59.09% | 13 |
| TOTAL | | 22 |

Q17 How many of these other outside bodies do you attend?

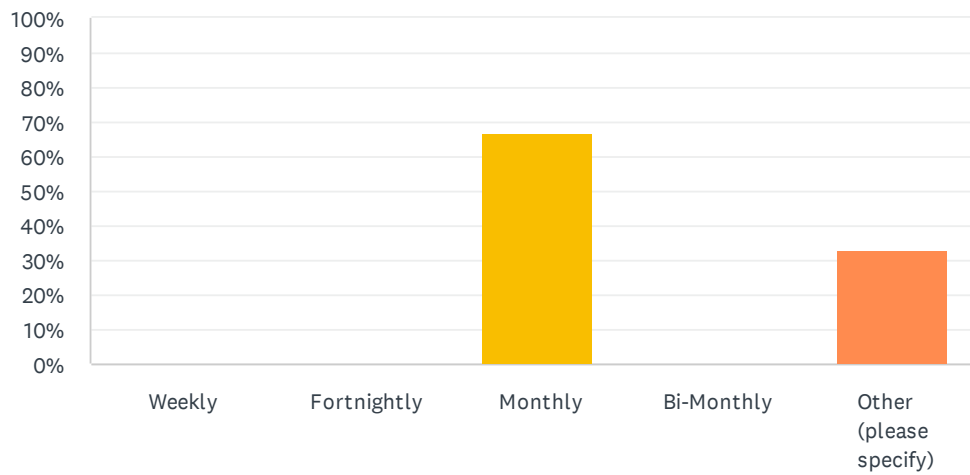
Answered: 9 Skipped: 17



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|---|
| 1 | 33.33% | 3 |
| 2 | 33.33% | 3 |
| 3 | 11.11% | 1 |
| 4 | 0.00% | 0 |
| 5 | 11.11% | 1 |
| More than 5 | 11.11% | 1 |
| TOTAL | | 9 |

Q18 How often do you attend these outside bodies?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 17

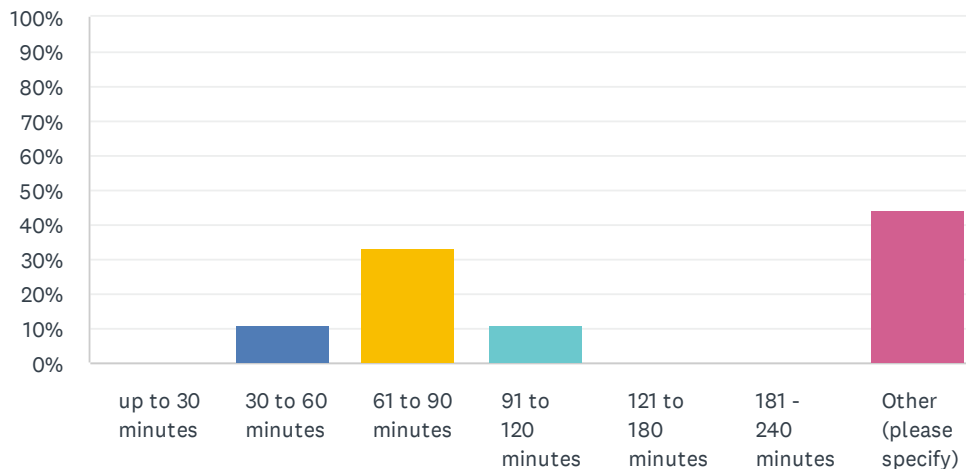


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Weekly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Fortnightly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Monthly | 66.67% | 6 |
| Bi-Monthly | 0.00% | 0 |
| Other (please specify) | 33.33% | 3 |
| TOTAL | | 9 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|-------------------|
| 1 | varies | 8/25/2025 4:02 PM |
| 2 | Most are monthly but if events are being organised I can attend more often & spend full days at community events as part of my role | 8/23/2025 2:54 PM |
| 3 | Quarterly | 8/6/2025 6:53 PM |

Q19 On average how much time do you commit to these outside bodies when you attend?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 17

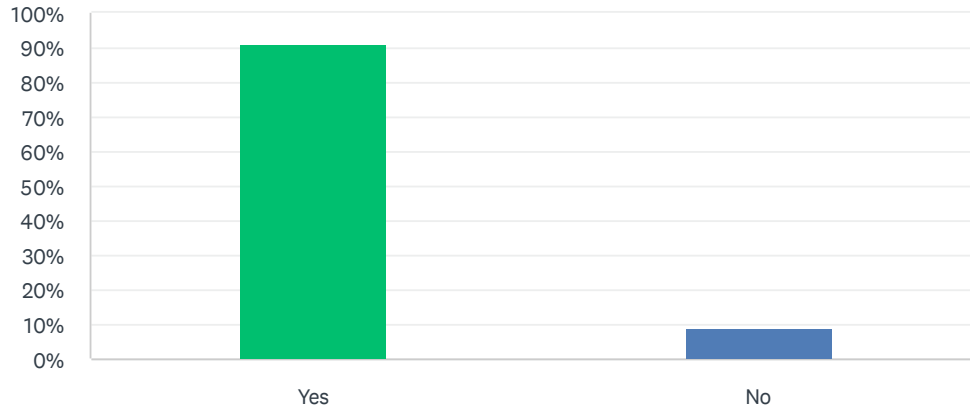


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 11.11% 1 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 33.33% 3 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 11.11% 1 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| Other (please specify) | 44.44% 4 |
| TOTAL | 9 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | Taken over the year, the total time preparing, travelling and attending outside bodies comes to 18,720 minutes. | 8/25/2025 4:02 PM |
| 2 | Meetings are approx 2 hours but events organised are 3-5hrs in length + prep time litter picking putting up equipment printing posters obtaining permissions leafleting etc | 8/23/2025 2:54 PM |
| 3 | 450 | 8/12/2025 12:48 PM |
| 4 | 360 | 8/12/2025 12:48 PM |

Q20 Are there any other meetings that you attend on a regular basis in order to discharge the responsibilities of your role?

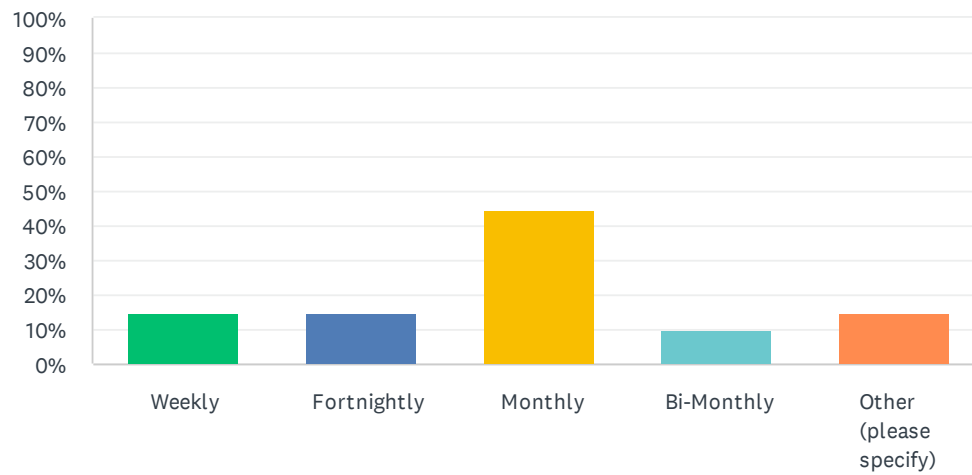
Answered: 22 Skipped: 4



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes | 90.91% | 20 |
| No | 9.09% | 2 |
| TOTAL | | 22 |

Q21 How often do you attend these other meetings?

Answered: 20 Skipped: 6

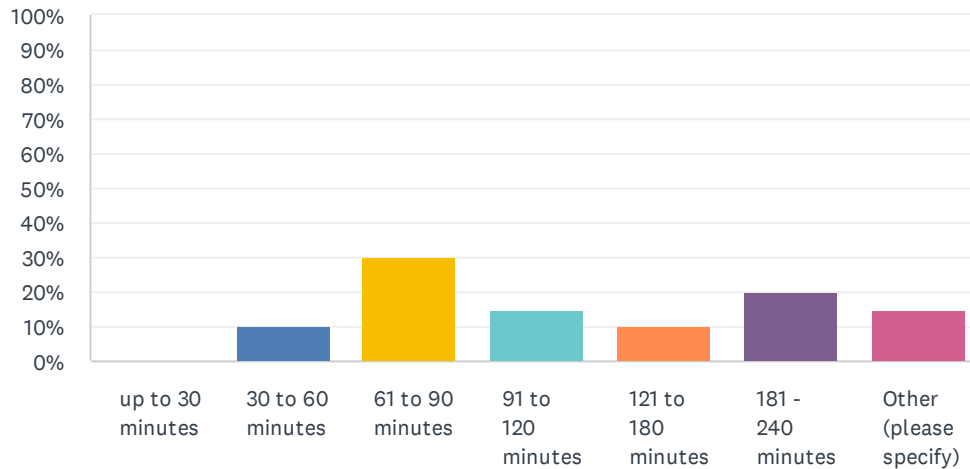


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Weekly | 15.00% | 3 |
| Fortnightly | 15.00% | 3 |
| Monthly | 45.00% | 9 |
| Bi-Monthly | 10.00% | 2 |
| Other (please specify) | 15.00% | 3 |
| TOTAL | | 20 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|---|--------------------|
| 1 | daily | 8/25/2025 11:19 PM |
| 2 | varries | 8/25/2025 4:04 PM |
| 3 | OCCASIONAL MEETINGS WITH OFFICERS ON SPECIFIC AREAS | 8/22/2025 12:16 PM |

Q22 On average how much time do you commit to these other meetings when you attend?

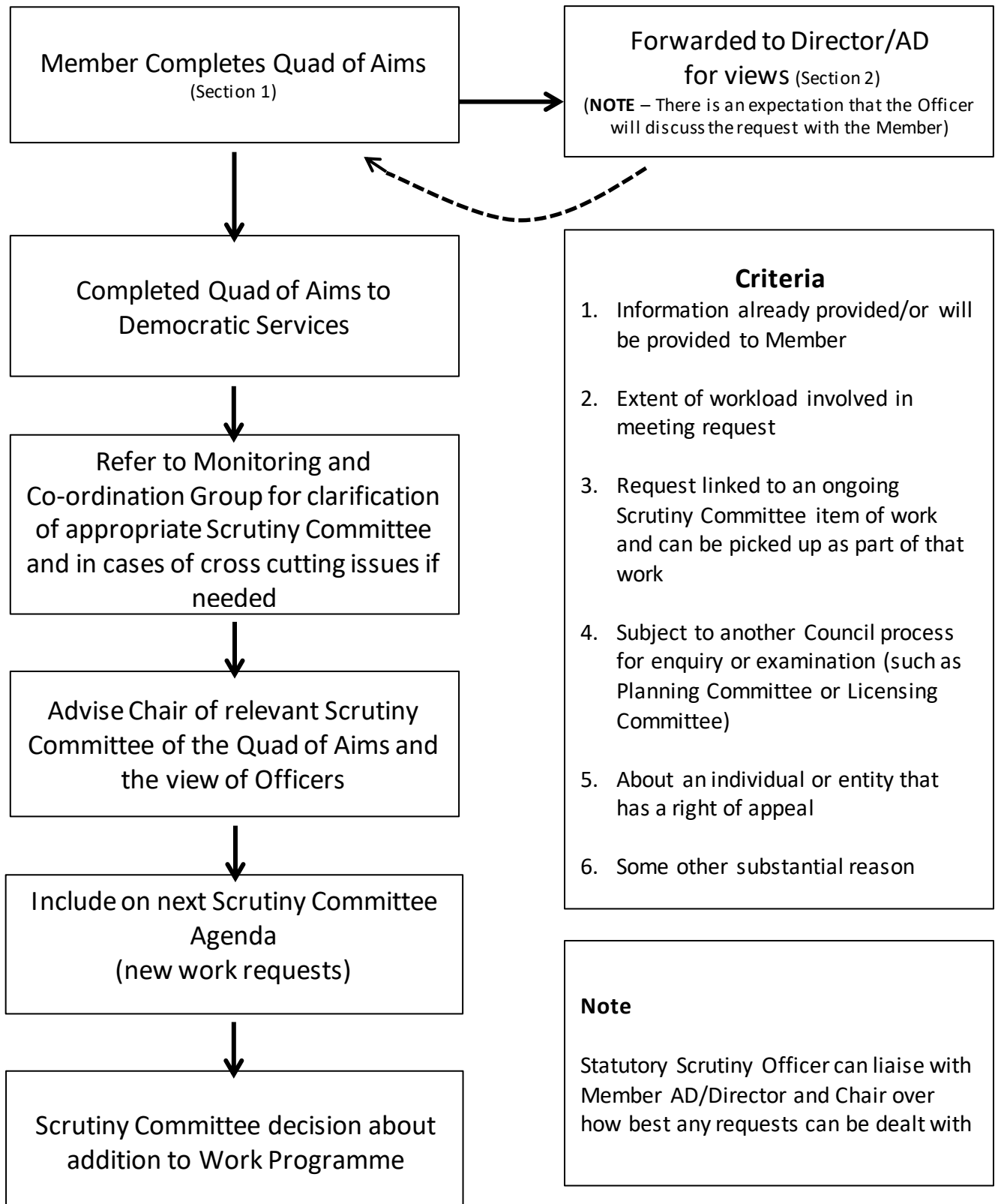
Answered: 20 Skipped: 6



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------|-----------|
| up to 30 minutes | 0.00% 0 |
| 30 to 60 minutes | 10.00% 2 |
| 61 to 90 minutes | 30.00% 6 |
| 91 to 120 minutes | 15.00% 3 |
| 121 to 180 minutes | 10.00% 2 |
| 181 - 240 minutes | 20.00% 4 |
| Other (please specify) | 15.00% 3 |
| TOTAL | 20 |

| # | OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) | DATE |
|---|--|-------------------|
| 1 | Over the year, preparing, traveling and attending briefing requires 3,780 minutes. | 8/25/2025 4:04 PM |
| 2 | Atleast 2 X 2hr meetings + 3 or 4 X 1hr long briefings/meetings (8hrs p.vw approx) | 8/23/2025 2:57 PM |
| 3 | It's hard to say because of the variety of documents and whether much annotation is required | 8/22/2025 3:24 PM |

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)

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| | | 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 ? | |

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

Signed **Position** **Date**

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

| Scrutiny Committees | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------|------|--|------------|--------|------------|----------|------------|------|
| Total number of Councillors on the LA | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Darlington | Durham | Gateshead | Hartlepool | Middlesbro' | Newcastle | NECA | N Tyneside | Northumb'd | Redcar | S Tyneside | Stockton | Sunderland | TVCA |
| 50 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Number of Councillors on Cabinet | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Darlington | Durham | Gateshead | Hartlepool | Middlesbro' | Newcastle | NECA | N Tyneside | Northumb'd | Redcar | S Tyneside | Stockton | Sunderland | TVCA |
| 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total number of Councillors able to sit on overview and scrutiny committees (not including Executive Members) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Darlington | Durham | Gateshead | Hartlepool | Middlesbro' | Newcastle | NECA | N Tyneside | Northumb'd | Redcar | S Tyneside | Stockton | Sunderland | TVCA |
| 42 | 115 | 56 | 10 | 40 | 58 | ? | | 67 | 59 | 45 | 49 | 68 | 15 |
| Names of overview and scrutiny committees (inc. number of seats) and frequency of meetings | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Darlington | | | | | | | North Tyneside | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults Scrutiny Committee (10 seats) – every 6/8 weeks (in line with the cycle of Council Meetings) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (10 seats)* – every 6/8 weeks Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee (10 seats) – every 6/8 weeks Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee (10 seats) – every 6/8 weeks Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee (10 seats) – every 6/8 weeks <p>* In addition to the above figure, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee also has seats for voting and non-voting co-optees, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x Church of England Diocese representative (voting rights) 1 x Roman Catholic Diocese representative (voting rights) 3 x Parent Governor representatives (voting rights) 3 x Community representatives (non-voting) 1 x Secondary Teaching representative (non-voting) 1 x Primary Teaching representative (non-voting) 1 x Further Education representative (non-voting) 1 x 11-19 Partnerships representative (non-voting) 1 x Primary Schools Forum representative (non-voting) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Durham | | | | | | | Northumberland | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (26 Members) – at least 6 meetings per year | | | | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities and Place OSC (10) – monthly | | | | | | |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer and Stronger Communities OSC (21 Members) – at least 4 meetings per year • Economy and Enterprise OSC (21 Members) – at least 4 meetings per year • Children and Young Peoples' OSC (21 Members) – at least 4 meetings per year • Adults Wellbeing and Health OSC (21 Members) – at least 4 meetings per year • Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC (21 Members) – at least 4 meetings per year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC (10) – bi-monthly • Family and Children's Services (10 + up to 9 co-opted) • Health and Wellbeing (10) |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care, Health and Wellbeing (18 seats) – 8 per year • Corporate Resources (18 seats) – 7 per year • Families (18 seats) – 7 per year • Housing, Environment and Healthy Communities (18 seats) – 7 per year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny and Improvement Committee (13 Members) – includes Health Scrutiny function • Children and Families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee (13 Members) • Corporate Resources and Governance Scrutiny and Improvement Committee (15 Members) • Growth Scrutiny and Improvement Committee (13 Members) • Climate and Environment Scrutiny and Improvement Committee (13 Members) – includes Crime and Disorder Scrutiny function <p>All Committees meet once every cycle, usually around 6-7 weeks. Corporate Resources and Governance Scrutiny and Improvement Committee includes the function for Call-in.</p> |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and Governance Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating and Call-in Committee (12 Members) – approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) • Adult Safeguarding, Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) • Children Safeguarding and Young People Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) • Our Place Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) • Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) • Contracts and Commissioning Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) • Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) - approx. 6 w weekly (6 per municipal year) |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and Scrutiny Board (15 seats) – every four weeks • People Scrutiny Panel (13 seats) – every four weeks • Place Scrutiny Panel (13 seats) – every four weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Scrutiny Committee (13 Members) – every two months • Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee (9 Members) – monthly • Children and Young People Select Committee (9 Members) – monthly • Community Safety Select Committee (9 Members) – monthly • People Select Committee (9 Members) – monthly • Place Select Committee (9 Members) – monthly |
| New castle | Sunderland |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview & Scrutiny Coordination Committee (13 Members + 4 co-optees) – monthly (exc. May & Aug) • Finance and Budget Monitoring Scrutiny Committee (10 Members) – monthly (exc. May and Aug) • Economy, Jobs and Skills Scrutiny Committee Finance and Budget Monitoring Scrutiny Committee (10 Members) – monthly (exc. May and Aug) • Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee (10 Members) – monthly (exc. Aug) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Coordinating Committee (14 Members) – monthly • Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – monthly • Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – monthly • Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee (12 Members) – monthly |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and Scrutiny Committee (15 Members) – 4 statutory meetings, 24/25 programme has 6 alongside the respective Sub-Committee meetings. |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| Are scrutiny chairs from the ruling or opposition group or a mixture? (please give details) | |
| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| Durham | Northumberland |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| New castle | Sunderland |
| NECA | TVCA |
| | |

| Scrutiny Resources | |
|--|---|
| Where does the scrutiny function sit within the Council's organisation (e.g. Democratic / Legal / Corporate Services, Chief Executive)? | |
| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| DBC Democratic Services (within the Operations Group) | |
| Durham | Northumberland |
| Legal and Democratic Services (under the Director of Legal and Democratic Services) | Members Services (Law and Governance Directorate) |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| Democratic Services (in the Governance Team, in the Corporate & Governance Directorate) | RCBC Democratic Services (within the Corporate Resources Directorate) |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team | Democratic Services (within the Legal and Governance department) |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| Democratic Services (within Legal and Governance Directorate) | SBC Democratic Services (within the Corporate Services directorate) |
| New castle | Sunderland |
| Democratic Services (City Operations, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services) | Law and Governance Team |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | Combined Authority – Statutory Meeting |
| How are overview and scrutiny committees supported (e.g. dedicated OSC team / Committee Services / support from service groupings)? | |
| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| The Democratic Manager is the Lead Scrutiny Officer and oversees the Scrutiny Function. Democratic Officers provide administrative support to the individual Scrutiny Committees, issue Agenda and Papers, co- | |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| <p>ordinate the Work Programme, clerk meetings, produce Minutes, arrange and support Task and Finish work etc.</p> <p>Democratic Officers are not dedicated OSC Officers, as they have a number of other responsibilities, including clerking the quasi-judicial committees and other committees of the Council, supporting other Working Groups, clerking service for School Admission Appeals, Electoral function, Mayoral function, etc. Support for the Scrutiny function is provided from within the Democratic Services Team by 1 x Democratic Manager, 2 x Democratic Officers, 1 x Democratic and Elections Officer and 1 x Mayoral and Democratic Officer, none of whom work on the Scrutiny function on a full-time basis.</p> <p>Each Scrutiny Committee has a Lead Officer or Officers, usually the relevant Assistant Director or Head of Service, who acts as the link between the committee and the relevant service area. The Lead Officer will generally attend Committee Meetings alongside their Officers, or may well take the lead on presenting reports to committee. Appropriate Officers are appointed to support Task and Finish work as required.</p> | |
| Durham | Northumberland |
| Dedicated OS Team with support from Committee services and Service Groups who provide reports / presentations. | Dedicated Scrutiny Team of two. Supported by Democratic Services Officers who prepare committee papers, take minutes etc. Scrutiny Officers wholly involved in processes around Task & Finish reviews. |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| <p>1 full time scrutiny & appeals coordinator</p> <p>3 full time DSOs</p> <p>No posts dedicated solely to scrutiny function.</p> | <p>3.4 FTE dual role Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officers (DSSO's) who manage the work of the scrutiny committees including issuing agendas / meeting papers and preparing minutes. They also undertake Committee administration support for other meetings.</p> <p>DSSO's manage task and finish work working closely with the relevant service lead (usually Assistant Director/service manager level).</p> |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| <p>Dedicated Scrutiny Team which also issues its own agendas / meeting papers.</p> <p>Relevant senior officers (usually Assistant Director / Head of Service) are appointed as the Link Officer for any in-depth / Task & Finish review to support the Committees work.</p> | <p>Supported by the Democratic Services team, with some (but not all) scrutiny committees having lead officers from the relevant service area who attend meetings and support with work programming.</p> <p>Democracy Support Officers in the Democratic Services teams support the scrutiny committees in terms of administration, e.g. agendas, minutes.</p> |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| <p>Democratic Services Officers – currently 5.5 FTE. Also service Committee and Executive Function.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview and Scrutiny Board – 1.5 DSOs (should be 2) Place Scrutiny Panel – 2 DSOs People Scrutiny Panel – 2 DSOs | Dedicated Scrutiny Team which also issues its own agendas / meeting papers. Relevant senior officers (usually Assistant Director / Head of Service) are appointed as the Link Officer for any in-depth / Task & Finish review to support the Committees work. |
| Newcastle | Sunderland |
| Two dedicated full-time Scrutiny Officers. Meeting support from Democratic Services Officers team. | Dedicated Scrutiny Team which provides support to scrutiny function including prep and development of agendas. Democratic Services Team issues meeting papers. Relevant senior officers (usually Assistant Director / Head of Service) attend and support as required. Task & Finish review to support the Committees work. |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | Support from Governance and Scrutiny Manager alongside Governance and Scrutiny Officer. Ad hoc departmental support from officers with Deep Dives within Sub-Committees. |
| If dedicated OSC team, how many members in the team? | |
| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| n/a | |
| Durham | Northumberland |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer 3 Overview and Scrutiny Officer 1 Overview and Scrutiny Assistant (Vacant) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One full-time Scrutiny Co-ordinator One full-time Scrutiny Officer |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| n/a | n/a |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Statutory Scrutiny Manager (part-time) 1 Scrutiny Officer (part-time) (supports with Democratic services and school appeals) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> x1 Scrutiny and Democracy Support Officer (Statutory Scrutiny Officer with responsibility for scrutiny function, in addition to co-managing Democratic Services team and providing some committee support) x1 Senior Democracy Support Officer (supports with scrutiny work in addition to other responsibilities) |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| n/a | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one Democratic Services Manager (includes oversight of scrutiny function) two full-time Scrutiny Officers one Scrutiny Support Officer (also sometimes supports Governance Team) |
| Newcastle | Sunderland |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one Democratic Services Manager (includes oversight of scrutiny function) two full-time Scrutiny Officers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members' Support Coordinator (oversight of the scrutiny function) Two Scrutiny Officers |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance and Scrutiny Manager (ad hoc support) Governance and Scrutiny Officer |

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Scrutiny Processes

Overview and co-ordination of scrutiny arrangements

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| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| <p>The Scrutiny Lead Officer maintains an overview of the Scrutiny function.</p> <p>The Constitution contains provision for a meeting of the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group (a meeting of the five Scrutiny Committee Chairs), who may meet to discuss any cross-cutting areas, and determine which Scrutiny Committee will lead on any such work.</p> | |
| Durham | Northumberland |
| <p>The COSMB is responsible for the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function providing a strategic steer. The five thematic OSCs have specific Terms of Reference and remits aligned to the County Durham Vision and Council Plan ambitions and objectives. Where issues impact on the remit of one or more OSCs, the COSMB might direct a lead OSC. COSMB is also responsible for dealing with any 'call-in' of executive decisions and also has responsibility to hear any appeals lodged in respect of the Council's Petitions scheme.</p> | <p>Chairs' Group made up of the 4 Chairs and 4 Vice-Chairs of the OSCs. Call Ins / Councillor Call for Action / Monitor Work Programmes.</p> |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| <p>Each of the committees have equal standing; there is no coordination or overarching committee.</p> <p>Where items may fall across the remit of 2 committees, it will be on the agenda for one committee, with members of the other committee invited to attend.</p> | <p>The scrutiny structure is largely a flat structure with each Committee determining its own work priorities.</p> <p>Where there are cross cutting 'corporate' issues, these would fall into the remit of Corporate Resources and Governance Scrutiny and Improvement Committee. This committee also deals with any call-ins.</p> |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| 1 Committee responsible for all activity management. | <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) is responsible for the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function and oversees the work programmes of scrutiny committees, receiving periodic updates from scrutiny committees Chairs (who all sit on the OSC Committee).</p> <p>The OSC also has scrutiny responsibility for corporate and cross-cutting issues and progress and performance against the Council's strategy and ambitions. Specific areas of scrutiny responsibility include: policy and performance management, equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging, digital and ICT, people and organisational change. OSC also has finance scrutiny responsibility which involves scrutiny of the budget.</p> <p>The OSC would determine where an issue should be scrutinised if it fell under more than one committee's remit. The OSC is responsible for the call-in of executive decisions.</p> |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| The Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) is responsible for the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function and oversees the work programme of the two scrutiny panels. Where matters do not fall neatly into the remit of any one committee, OSB would decide on who should assume responsibility. It is also responsible for dealing with any 'call-in' of executive decisions. | The Executive Scrutiny Committee (ESC) is responsible for the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function and oversees the work programme of the Select Committees. Where matters do not fall neatly into the remit of any one committee, the ESC would decide on who should assume responsibility. It is also responsible for dealing with any 'call-in' of executive decisions. |
| Newcastle | Sunderland |
| Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Committee maintains overview of all Committee WP. However the individual Committees set their own work programmes and they are all shared each Committee meeting as a joint document. | The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee is responsible for the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function and provides a coordinating role in terms of the thematic scrutiny Committees. Where matters do not fall neatly into the remit of any one committee, the Coordinating Committee would decide on who should assume responsibility. |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | Single Committee with several Sub-Committees. Arranged directly with Chair and relevant SC Chairs. |
| Process for setting work programme | |
| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| <p>The setting of the Work Programme is a matter for each Committee themselves. A draft Work Programme is produced for consideration at the initial meeting of the Municipal Year, structured around any ongoing work, annual monitoring reports, Officer recommendations, etc. and the Committee are invited to discuss, add and remove items from the draft Work Programme as they see appropriate.</p> <p>Subsequent to the Work Programme being agreed at the initial meeting, Members are required to submit a 'Quad of Aims' to request that anything further be added to the Work Programme during the Municipal Year.</p> <p>The 'Quad of Aims' document invites a Member to identify the reason for the request, the Officer resource required, the process they would like to undertake and the value that would be added by undertaking the piece of work.</p> <p>This 'Quad of Aims' is then considered by the Committee at the next available meeting.</p> | |
| Durham | Northumberland |
| The COSMB and thematic OSCs are responsible for setting their own Work Programmes. Work programmes are informed by the County Durham Vision and Council Plan ambitions and objectives; Cabinet Notice of Key Decisions; Partnership plans and strategies; performance and budgetary data; government legislation and local priorities from Councillors and their communities. Chairs and Vice Chairs meet with Service Directors and Heads of Service supported by the OS Team and draft work programmes are agreed at the first OS meetings within the municipal year. | Scrutiny Officers co-ordinate OSC priorities with Portfolio Holders / Executive Directors and progress those with the OSC Chairs. |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| <p>Ideas are sought from all Elected Members and senior officers.</p> <p>These ideas are presented to committee at the last meeting of the municipal year, with the opportunity to add to the topics or raise any issues for prioritisation.</p> <p>The work programme is then a standing item on the agenda for each meeting so there is an opportunity for members to raise any urgent issues that arise during the year.</p> | <p>We have tried to build more structure into the process in the last couple of years. All Members are requested to submit suggestions. Suggestions are also invited from management and Cabinet. Work programming sessions have been held for each committee (Chair, Vice Chair, relevant Director, relevant Cabinet Member) to consider and prioritise topics and areas of focus for each committee.</p> <p>A prioritisation flow chart has been introduced to assist with the process.</p> <p>There are a mix of topics and review methods – some issues being dealt with through formal meetings over 2-3 meetings, others being dealt with through a less formal task and finish approach.</p> <p>For these more detailed topics, a scoping document is agreed to keep the work on track.</p> <p>The work programme is a standing item on each agenda to monitor progress.</p> |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| <p>Annual review of potential topics using PICK matrix.</p> | <p>Directors and Heads of Service are asked for lists of possible focus areas for scrutiny at the beginning of each municipal year. These are discussed in meetings between individual meetings of Directorate Leadership Teams and the Scrutiny and Democracy Support Officer. These are then compiled for each Committee as a longlist and discussed with the Chair and Vice Chair, as well as any lead officers for each Committee. For some Committees, officers from the service area are more involved in developing the work programme (e.g. Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee).</p> <p>At the first meeting of each municipal year, all Committee Members are then asked for any additional areas they may wish to consider for the work programme and the list of topics as discussed with the Chair and Vice Chair would be prioritised and matched to dates of committees.</p> <p>At the beginning of the municipal year, all scrutiny Chairs meet with Cabinet to discuss the Executive's priorities for the upcoming year and consider where scrutiny could be involved to add value.</p> <p>As the year progresses, at each Committee meeting Members review the work programme to ensure it is best placed for efficient use of time and consider any additional items that may need added depending on urgency.</p> |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| <p>Suggestions for topics are invited in April of each year from members of the public, voluntary sector organisations, Elected Members and all directorates. Each scrutiny panel determines which topics to investigate and the OSB approves the work programme.</p> | <p>A Scrutiny Liaison Forum (SLF), consisting of Cabinet Members, scrutiny Chairs and Corporate Directors, convenes annually (usually early-March). This forum meets in order to identify possible areas for future scrutiny reviews and to foster a constructive working relationship. All Members are asked for ideas for the work programme and these are fed into the process, together with officer suggestions feeding in from departmental and corporate management teams. A business case is created for each issue in order to help prioritisation.</p> <p>The ESC co-ordinates the work of the Select Committees. Should any urgent issues arise during the year, ESC will determine how they should be handled by a Select Committee and if current work should be suspended.</p> |
| Newcastle | Sunderland |
| <p>We have recently adopted a joint work programming and prioritisation protocol, to ensure agenda items added are relevant, prioritised and do not duplicate the work of other Committees.</p> | <p>Work programmes are set at the beginning of each council year and development sessions are held by each committee with support from key stakeholders both internally and from partners. These sessions provide the basis for work programme issues through the year and also provide a long list of potential task and finish topics.</p> |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| | Each committee is ultimately responsible for the management and progress of its own work programme. The Coordinating Committee provides a coordinating role, and the Chairs of the other committees also sit on the Coordinating Committee to further strengthen this. |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | Work Programme is fed into the annual first meeting of Committee. Consultation on 'suggested' topics is provided from soft touch consultation with Cabinet / Officers. Programme itself is wholly agreed / managed by Committee with Officer support. Structured as a live document that develops through the municipal year. General management of the Committee / Sub-Committees is the responsibility of the Governance and Scrutiny Officer. |
| Mechanisms for liaison with Cabinet | |
| Darlington | North Tyneside |
| The relevant Cabinet Member / Members are invited to attend meetings of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, and may participate in discussion at the discretion of the Chair. Any Task and Finish Group recommendations, which are subsequently agreed by the Scrutiny Committee, and which require Cabinet approval, are referred on to the next available meeting of the Cabinet. There is a standing item on the Cabinet Agenda to take any such referrals. | |
| Durham | Northumberland |
| DCC's constitution (Article 5) includes requirements for appropriate liaison with COSMB and the executive in the interests of achieving common aims and continuous improvement for the council. Cabinet members and senior officers attend overview and scrutiny committees to provide information as part of policy development and review and to respond to concerns expressed by scrutiny in respect of service delivery issues. Informal arrangements work well with shared dialogue at regular executive and non-executive meetings which involve discussions between Cabinet Portfolio holders and COSMB/OSC Chairs and Vice Chairs. These meeting discuss issues planned for scrutiny debate at OSCs but also allow for Cabinet members to share key issues on the horizon for Cabinet consideration. | A protocol has been drafted but not yet adopted. The delay is because everything appears to be working well, so no need to formalise an arrangement at this stage. |
| Gateshead | Redcar & Cleveland |
| No formal protocol in place. Ad-hoc discussions and some Cabinet member attendance at OSC meetings. | There is no formal protocol in place, but an established practice of Cabinet Members being invited to Scrutiny Committees to answer question on any Cabinet reports relating to their portfolio report that are being considered within the cycle. Cabinet Members hear the comments and suggestions first hand. Scrutiny Chairs are invited to attend Cabinet meetings and invited to feed in the comments of the scrutiny committee on the relevant items. All Scrutiny Committees are timetabled in the week before Cabinet to facilitate this process. Performance reports are considered at each scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis and Cabinet Members are invited to comment and answer questions as a matter of routine. |
| Hartlepool | South Tyneside |
| No Cabinet system as HBC operate a hybrid committee system. | Cabinet Members are notified when any item in their portfolio is to be considered at a scrutiny committee and are invited to provide evidence. |

Regional Scrutiny Networks: Scrutiny Structures

September 2024

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| | <p>At the beginning of the municipal year, all scrutiny Chairs meet with Cabinet to discuss the Executive's priorities for the upcoming year and consider where scrutiny could be involved to add value.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council attends a session of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating and Call-in Committee to provide an annual update on progress against the Council's Vision, Strategy and Ambition Policy Documents. This session is also used as a general Q&A of scrutiny Members to the Leader.</p> |
| Middlesbrough | Stockton-on-Tees |
| Executive Members present updates on their portfolios to OSB in rotation throughout the year. An OSB update is presented to every Council meeting. | <p>A protocol is in place for the involvement of officers and Members during a scrutiny review. This allows for 'tri-partite' meetings between Cabinet Members, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Select Committee, and Corporate Director. These take place at key points during the review. Cabinet Members are also part of the Scrutiny Liaison Forum and so have an input into the setting of the work programme.</p> <p>It is an expectation that the appropriate Cabinet Member would be called to give evidence during a review as a matter of course. Cabinet Members are also expected to accompany Corporate Directors when an annual overview of each Council directorate is provided to the relevant Select Committee.</p> |
| Newcastle | Sunderland |
| No official protocol. Reports and recommendations submitted to Cabinet as they arise. | There is a Cabinet / Scrutiny Protocol which was developed through a task and finish working group of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee. |
| NECA | TVCA |
| Given the CA is so different and still very much in its infancy we don't yet have much information to share on studies and structures. | <p>Ongoing review of relationship in relation to the recommendations of the Tees Valley Review. Currently Chair invited to speak at points of referral to Cabinet (recommendations passing up).</p> <p>As would be the given case, if required during the process of a Sub-Committee, Cabinet members are required to attend sessions (as they would be for full Committees where requested).</p> |

Other Comments (e.g. ongoing concerns / potential future developments regarding existing scrutiny structure)

Middlesbrough

This new structure of 3 panels has been introduced in May 2024 due to limited resources for scrutiny and previous poor resilience within the existing small team. Member engagement is limited and the DSOs are working to improve this with regular Chair / Vice Chair and DSO team meetings as well as an audit log of actions taken to embed the new structure.

Newcastle

We have a number of vacancies on some of our Committees that have been challenging to fill. We are aiming to align more closely with corporate policies and improve the flow of information / horizon scanning.

South Tyneside

The Scrutiny Committee structure was refreshed for the municipal year 2024/25, so is still very new to Members and Officers and in the process of being embedded. The refresh was wide-ranging and revised Terms of Reference for scrutiny committees. This came following concerns / perceptions that some scrutiny committees did not have clear areas of focus, issues often crossed over more than one committee and there was a 'two-tier' scrutiny structure of select committees and performance panels.

Furthermore, as part of the scrutiny refresh it was agreed for Independent Scrutiny Representatives to be appointed to scrutiny committees (but not the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating and Call-in Committee). There was space on each scrutiny committee for 2 Independent Scrutiny Representatives and these were recently appointed following a recruitment process and agreement at Borough Council.

TVCA

Adoption of Scrutiny Protocol ongoing – awaiting ratification at Cabinet.

Committee agreed to full implementation of the protocol, following ratification, Officers will track and complete the associated tasks for delivery.

Adoption of recommendations following Tees Valley Review – as above.

Several recommendations for Scrutiny and Governance in general. These items will be addressed through the process and be fed back to Committee with progress.

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

DOLPHIN CENTRE ASSET MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Matthew Roche – Health and Housing
Responsible Director - Dave Winstanley, Executive Director – Environment, Highways & Community Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To request that Council vary the capital budget by approving and releasing capital funding as detailed in the recommendations, to enable the delivery of the Dolphin Centre asset management programme of works and investment opportunities.

Summary

2. The Dolphin Centre is the Council's only indoor leisure facility and is a key asset in contributing to the vision in the Council Plan and ambition for our residents to live well and stay healthy. The centre provides a range of health and wellbeing activities for all, as well as it being a key community, leisure and social venue.
3. Located in the town centre, it is accessible for all and supports the continued change of town centres and high streets. There is now a greater emphasis on leisure and social activities in town centres, and the centre contributes to the mix of uses and town centre footfall.
4. The Dolphin centre is now over 43 years old and encompasses the much older Central Hall listed building. As with any building, and particularly older listed buildings there is a need to undertake periodic investment to keep the buildings operating and compliant with statutory requirements. This report provides an update on the asset management programme for the centre and seeks approval to progress with an essential repairs programme.
5. Having good quality leisure facilities along with other quality services and facilities is key to creating the conditions for inclusive economic growth that benefit our residents, investors or people looking to locate into the Borough. People want to know there are good facilities for them and their families to be healthy and enjoy.
6. Investment in the Dolphin Centre has always been a priority and there has been a substantial maintenance programme in recent years due to the age and nature of the

building, as well as a range of significant upgrades and refurbishments. This is to ensure quality services are provided to the people of the Borough and because so much of the activity at the centre links to the aspirations of the Council Plan.

7. The recent repairs to the pool have seen an increase in swimming and investment in the DC Bowl has strengthened the provisions of the centre. Two new options for investment in the Dolphin Centre have been developed for consideration by Members. These are the provision of an indoor golf with interactive darts and shuffleboard area and a new spinning studio and fitness studio refurbishment. These two elements are being proposed on the basis they would be self-financing and reduce the overall subsidy of the Dolphin centre from the MTFP.
8. On 9 September 2025 Cabinet considered a similar report and approved the recommendations to move forward to Council for consideration and decision.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that Council:-
 - (a) Approve the proposed asset management programme outlined in the report and approval and release of £6.742M to continue the programme of repairs and maintenance.
 - (b) Approve the refurbishment of the space that used to be used for marriage and civil ceremonies and create an indoor golf, interactive darts and shuffleboard area, as detailed in this report and approve and release of £1.456M for the project on the basis this will generate a surplus of funding from income.
 - (c) Approve the creation of a new studio, with spinning equipment and approve and release of £0.752M on the basis this will generate a surplus of funding from income.

Reasons

10. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) To enable the asset management programme of essential works on the Dolphin Centre to continue.
 - (b) To enable the indoor golf, interactive darts and shuffleboard project and the new spinning studio and fitness studio refurbishment project to progress, which will increase the facilities at the Dolphin centre for residents of the Borough, contribute to the vision and ambition of the Council Plan and reduce the overall subsidy to the Dolphin Centre from the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Dave Winstanley
Executive Director – Environment, Highways & Community Services

Background Papers

Cabinet report 9 September 2025

Cabinet report 5 July 2022

Cabinet report 11 August 2023

Cabinet report 5 September 2023

Ian Thompson: Extension 6628

Lisa Soderman: Extension 6980

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| Council Plan | The Dolphin Centre contributes positively to the Councils ambitions and numerous the Councils priorities. |
| Addressing inequalities | The Dolphin Centre is one of the Council's key community facilities that is accessible and available to all. |
| Tackling Climate Change | There will be a positive impact on carbon reduction as a result of installing modern and efficient mechanical and electrical plant and equipment. |
| Efficient and effective use of resources | The investment opportunities present an opportunity to invest to save and reduce subsidy levels. The asset management programme is anticipated to save on energy and reduce the increasing number of reactive repairs that impact on cost and efficient and effective operation of the centre. |
| Health and Wellbeing | The Dolphin Centre is the Council's key facility in providing opportunities for residents to participate in an active and healthy lifestyle. |
| S17 Crime and Disorder | The content of this report will not impact on crime and disorder. |
| Wards Affected | Park East |
| Groups Affected | No group will be adversely affected as a result of this report. |
| Budget and Policy Framework | Cabinet have delegated approval to vary the capital budget by £500k per a year. Cabinets delegated approval to vary the capital budget will be exceeded by the proposed works within this report. Cabinet have approved the recommendations therefore Cabinet are requesting Council to vary the Capital Budget to enable the work to progress. There is no impact on the Council's policy framework. |
| Key Decision | This is a key decision |
| 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

Background

11. The vision in the Council Plan is that “Darlington is one of the best places to live, learn, work and invest in the UK, with a strong and sustainable economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all.”
12. The Dolphin Centre is the Council’s only indoor leisure facility and a key asset. It contributes to the vision and ambition for our residents to live well and stay healthy by providing a range a health and wellbeing activities as well as it being a key community, leisure and social venue in the town centre.
13. The location of the centre makes it accessible for all and supports the shift in the function of town centres and High Streets as they continue to change. There is now a greater emphasis on leisure and social activities in town centres, and the Dolphin centre contributes to mix of uses and the town centre footfall.
14. Having good quality leisure facilities along with other quality services and facilities is key to creating the inclusive economic growth conditions that are attractive to investors or people looking to locate in the Borough. People want to know there are good facilities to be healthy and enjoy.
15. To summarise, the Dolphin Centre is a key council asset and contributes to the vision and ambitions in the Council Plan by helping people:-
 - a) Live well and staying healthy.
 - b) Supports inclusive and sustainable economy.
 - c) Support the town centre and Borough being a thriving place and connected communities.
16. Key features and services provided in the centre include:
 - (a) 25 metre swimming pool with separate diving pool and boards, slides, training pool and toddler pool.
 - (b) Accessible in the town centre and contributes to town centre footfall with circa 900k visits per year.
 - (c) Water education programme and delivery of Key Stage 2 swimming to primary schools in Darlington.
 - (d) Modern gym facilities for members, casual users and college curriculum usage. The team are GP referral qualified, and local GPs refer into our team to

support health improvement and rehabilitation.

- (e) Fitness class programme.
- (f) Sports Hall facilities, equivalent to two 5 aside courts.
- (g) Recently refurbished and extended soft play facilities.
- (h) DC Bowl providing bowling lanes.
- (i) Catering and hospitality including a Bistro, café and pavement café generating up to £1m income per year.
- (j) Indoor events programme including sporting events, concerts, weddings and more.
- (k) A number of partners based in the Dolphin Centre including Connect Health who deliver the muscular skeletal contract on behalf of the NHS, Darlington Amateur Swimming Club, Darlington College and many more.

Asset Management Programme

17. The Dolphin Centre opened in November 1982 and will have been open for 43 years this year and is a key council asset. It is a substantial venue having been built around a much older listed building, Central Hall. As with any building, and older listed buildings there is a need to undertake periodic investment to keep the facility operating and compliant with statutory requirements.
18. There have been numerous interventions and changes to the building over the years, the most significant in 2006, which resulted in substantial remodelling of the building. However, this was mainly a “operating model” type intervention and changes to the building, with limited work carried out on the mechanical and electrical (M&E) installations. Whilst there has always been an ongoing repairs and maintenance programme, in recent years there has been a substantial maintenance programme due to the age and nature of the building, as well as a range of significant upgrades and refurbishments to modernise facilities for users.
19. In 2012/13, a detailed study of the Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) installations in Dolphin Centre was carried out. A phased approach to the replacement and upgrading of the mechanical and electrical installations was agreed and reports on the various phases have been brought to Cabinet with the programme still ongoing with the final phase still to deliver.
20. The M&E programme was paused in 2023/24 to undertake some urgent works to the main pool tank, toddler pool and shower area including repairs to support beams, water proofing, repairs to channels and retiling. Further work to the structural elements of the diving pool and training pool tank structure was identified needing to be undertaken in future years.

21. All leisure and swimming facilities have seen significant pressures in recent years with energy inflation. The Government recognised this and launched a funding opportunity with incredibly tight timescales. DBC were successful with a funding bid to Sport England receiving funding of £0.526M for a new Combined Heat and Power system (CHP) and Photo voltaic (PVs). The Council did not receive the full funding bid but received £0.271M for the CHP and £0.255M for the PVs with the balance coming from the approved M&E budget allocation, with elements of the M&E programme also being delivered as part of this project.
22. The final phase of the M&E programme was paused whilst the structural issues associated with the pool were resolved. The estimates were provided a number of years ago and based on feasibility work undertaken over 10 years ago. Therefore, it was considered prudent to undertake a full review and given the changes in the construction sector and building technology. A detailed survey of the building has been undertaken to provide detailed cost estimates of the final phase, and this has identified additional works being needed since the original surveys in 2012/13 as a significant period has lapsed.
23. The works being put forward in this report are the essential items of repair that needs to be undertaken to keep the Dolphin Centre operational this includes M&E and other elements of the building fabric, such as windows. At the start of the design process a review was undertaken to ensure that only essential items were included in the overall cost plan. A number of areas have been excluded for example a new ceiling to sports hall and a significantly reduced lighting scheme in sports hall has been included. The remaining work is all essential as most of the plant and equipment is now 43 years old, beyond its anticipated replacement date and starting to fail impacting on operation of the centre.
24. More work has been identified and revised estimates to undertake required works are now higher than estimates produced over four years ago given more work has been included. It is also an indication of the changes in construction inflation and standards.
25. A significant development in the construction sector is the profile and importance of fire strategy since Grenfell and the subsequent reviews. As part of the project this has needed to be reviewed. This has involved:
 - (a) A review of the fire strategy for the building including fire compartments.
 - (b) Updated fire risk assessment for the Dolphin Centre.
 - (c) Advice has been taken from the Councils insurance company Zurich and fire risk consultants.
26. The approach proposed to be taken is where there is significant interventions or full refurbishment of an area, any fire stopping matters within the compartment zones will be rectified to the latest standards, this will include a full review of fire doors.

Areas within the Dolphin that are not subject to refurbishment or significant interventions as part of these works will be reviewed in the future if and when refurbishment takes place in these areas.

27. A sample area has been investigated to examine the likely rectifications that may be required to meet current standards. There will be works to be undertaken, but it is not considered cost effective to undertake this level of intrusive survey throughout the building, so a sum has been estimated and is proposed to be built into the cost plan that can be drawn down if rectification works are identified as works progress.
28. This approach has been agreed with the fire strategy consultant and the Fire Risk Assessor. Advice has also been taken from the Council's insurance company Zurich, who have confirmed they are satisfied with the proposed approach.
29. As mentioned in previous cabinet reports, further monitoring was planned in relation to the structural elements of the diving and training pool areas as further work would be required. The monitoring of the structural elements has identified work is required to the diving pool in the next 18 months. The final phase of the M&E works will mean disruption to various areas of the centre. The diving pool being one, therefore it is proposed to build the repair works on the diving pool into the programme and minimise the overall disruption to the centre. The pool will be emptied, and investigation works undertaken in areas to determine the scale of the repairs. The estimates in the financial section of the report are based on the findings in the main pool.
30. More detail on the costs for the asset management programme are included in the financial section of the report.

Investment Opportunities

31. The Dolphin Centre is a key council asset contributing to helping our residents live well and stay healthy by providing a range of health and wellbeing activities as well as a key community, leisure and social venue in the town centre.
32. The location of the centre makes it accessible for all and supports the shift in the function of town centres and High Streets as they continue to change. There is now a greater emphasis on leisure and social activities in town centres, and the Dolphin centre contributes to mix of uses and the town centre footfall.
33. The recent investment in the DC Bowl has strengthened the provisions of the centre and more options have been developed to ensure the Borough has good quality leisure facilities along with other quality services and facilities that will continue to create the conditions that are attractive to our residents, investors or people looking to locate in Darlington. People want to know there are good facilities for them and their children to enjoy and be healthy.

34. The Dolphin Centre is a significant building and maximising the use of the space is critical. Two new options for investment have been developed for consideration by Members.

(a) An Indoor Golf with Interactive Darts and Shuffleboard project.

(b) A new Spinning Studio and Fitness Studio refurbishment.

Indoor Golf with interactive darts and shuffleboard

35. An indoor golf, interactive darts and shuffleboard option has been investigated which will build on the entertainment offer within the Dolphin Centre complementing the successful DC Bowl. This is envisaged to appeal to both the daytime family market and an adult market on evenings. This will contribute to the Physical Activity Strategy whereby encouraging people to become active, by whatever means, has many positive effects on health and well-being.

36. The strategy is to maximise the use of the asset and identify the Dolphin Centre as a nighttime destination for entertainment and to secure financial growth where there is capacity for increased business on evenings.

37. The indoor golf will be a bespoke modular installation that will tie in with the theme and feel of the bowling alley to ensure there is continuity between the new entertainment offer and existing. Through the design and lighting an appropriate atmosphere can be created for the both the family and adult markets. The design will be carried through into the Bistro an area that requires essential mechanical, electrical plant and fire compartmentation works completed as part of the main project.

38. It is proposed that three interactive darts stations that are a technical enhanced twist to traditional darts as well as one interactive shuffleboard are included. Both the interactive darts and shuffleboard work well within this type of entertainment venue complementing the golf and bowling alley, creating a fun social environment for both families and adults and extends the overall visit.

39. Within the new entertainment venue there will be a bar area offering customer the opportunity to enjoy refreshments whilst having fun and enjoying the golf and wider offer.

40. The Bistro area is subject to significant M&E works and will be redesigned to follow the design principles of the DC Bowl and new Golf entertainment area making the whole area integrated. There will be no loss of capacity in terms of space and seating and the project team will look to increase capacity wherever possible, given the current busy daytime patronage.

41. Concept design illustrations of the venue are attached at **Appendix 1**.

42. The areas within the building where this new venue will be located is the existing Stephenson room, Pease room and seminar room. These areas are currently utilised for meetings, classes and courses which for the majority will be relocated into other areas within the Dolphin centre. Initial consultation has taken place with regular users and will continue as we work through each group's individual requirements if the project is approved to progress.
43. There will be disruption, and a communications plan has been developed that will aim to keep staff, customers, clubs and partners advised ahead of the works and throughout. There are a number of areas of the Dolphin Centre that will be closed. Every effort will be made to minimise these periods and offer alternative venues. There is a plan to work with any clubs and groups who will need to be permanently relocated, and every effort will be made to provide alternative provision with the Dolphin centre. There will be revenue implications as a result of this project, which have been built into the financial assumptions. More detail of the planned works and mitigations are provided in the milestones and programme section of this report and **Appendix 2**.
44. The financial aspects of the proposal are included in the financial section of the report.

New Spinning Studio and Fitness Studio refurbishment.

45. The Dolphin Centres primary focus is health and wellbeing for residents of Darlington. In recent years investment has been made into the gym facilities which has in turn increased memberships from 550 members to in excess of the budget base of 1900. The approach in all business areas is a constant challenge and investment which enables the centre to ensure facilities are high quality, in line with current demands and attractive to residents. This approach allows continuous improvement, maintenance of membership levels and constant drive to reduce subsidy levels of the MTFP and deliver outcomes in the Council Plan.
46. The existing fitness studio needs investment. This area is running outside of its life cycle and not in line with the quality of facilities elsewhere and also not to the standards in the building, in particular the gym and pool. To further increase the capacity to attract new members and retain existing it is proposed to install a bespoke spinning studio directly adjacent to the fitness studio. This area is currently redundant and not a well utilised space. The spinning studio would include virtual classes in addition to the traditional instructor led classes making the space accessible for members throughout the opening hours of the Dolphin Centre. Modern decoration, equipment and lighting will provide an excellent, high quality member experience that will compete with the local market and support the retention and growth of the membership base.
47. The financial aspects of the proposal are included in the financial section of the report.

Programme and milestones

48. If approved, the programme of work is scheduled to commence in November 2025 and be delivered in two phases, with planned completion September 2026 (38 weeks).
49. It is acknowledged that there will be disruption in certain areas and details are provided in **Appendix 2** of what is planned and how we intend to mitigate the disruption wherever possible. A communications plan has been developed that will aim to keep staff, customers, clubs and partners advised ahead of the works and throughout.

Financial Implications

Asset Management Programme

50. The Asset Management Programme is ongoing and some of the elements outlined below are being delivered on site as part of the previously approved programme.
51. The cost plan for asset management programme is outlined in the table below:

| Project Element | Budget | Status |
|--|--|-----------|
| Previously approved budget (incl. Sport England Grant) | £2.776M | Approved |
| The Combined Heat and Power & Photo Voltaic Project (£526k from Sport England) match funding requirement. This includes essential M&E works linked to this equipment and air handling units in basement plant room that needed to be undertaken as part of the CHP and PV project. | £1.709M current projected outturn | On Site |
| Fees including surveys, design and development costs of the current project and the next phases of the asset management programme and investment opportunities | £0.459M | Committed |
| Total Estimated Expenditure | £2.168M | |
| Remaining funds from Approved Budget | £0.608M | |

| Asset Management Programme subject to Approval | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Asset Management Mechanical and Electrical renewals and other essential elements of asset management. | £4.906M | Subject to Approval |
| Fire Strategy Any fire stopping required to be undertaken to meet current standards in areas where there any major works being undertaken, including the replacement of any fire doors requiring upgrades. The budget also includes specialist consultants to oversee and approval the works. | £0.753M See Note 1 | Subject to Approval |

| | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Project Contingency – See Note 2 | £0.531M See Note 2 | Subject to Approval |
| Diving Pool Tank structural repairs and re-waterproofing. | £1.100M | Subject to Approval |
| Project Management | £0.060M | Subject to Approval |
| Total | £7.350M | |
| Remaining approved Budget | £0.608M | |
| Funds sought to be approved | £6.742M | |
| <p>Note 1</p> <p>The proposed approach from the design/build contractor was to undertake intrusive surveys in all parts of the building to be able to provide costs. This would mean closing an area, removing ceilings, surveying and re-fitting the ceilings. This would have significant cost in terms of lost income, inconvenience and the costs for doing these survey works. Instead, a sample survey has been carried out in the studio with regard to identifying the type of defects in that area to understand the issues and the interventions that could be required. From this work the design/build contractor has worked with the supply chain to prepare costs to repair the defects. This information has been used to estimate the costs for the work required to repair the defects in the areas where significant interventions or refurbishment is taking place.</p> <p>This contingency sum will only be drawn down if required but provision in the budget is required to be approved.</p> | | |
| <p>Note 2</p> <p>A relatively high contingency has been built into the budget. This is to cover the approach being taken to fire stopping works that may be identified and also the risk associated with works to the diving pool. The full extents of the repairs will not be known until the pool is drained and the tiles and waterproofing removed to expose the structural elements.</p> | | |

52. Subject to approval, it is proposed the capital works would be funded through prudential borrowing over the life of the asset (40 years), at an estimated annual cost of £0.328M based on current borrowing costs and the MTFP would be adjusted to reflect the approval.

Investment Programme

53. In terms of the Investment Programme, the cost plans and financial aspects have been developed on existing usage patterns and rates advised by industry experts who have experience of this sector along with benchmarking and consultation with finance officers. The details are below:

Indoor golf with interactive darts and shuffleboard

54. The cost plan and business cases have been developed on a range of scenarios. The proposal in the report is an average price per game of £7.20 and 50 games on

average per day. This is a total of 18,000 games per year. Sensitivity checks have been undertaken and whilst the industry recommended average is 55 games per day a more cautious number has been assumed.

55. Interactive darts is projected to attract 3150 games per year with a price per game of £20 (hire of the space) and Shuffleboard 1000 games with a price per game of £25. Similarly to the golf projections this has been based on industry advice.
56. Testing this against the performance of DC bowl, the last three years has averaged 825 games per week, which is more than the anticipated 700 games per week in the original business case for that facility. The bowling reduced the subsidy of the Dolphin by £0.114M in 2024/25 – this was £0.029M better than the £0.085M surplus target that was built into the MTFP in 2024/25.
57. The number of games for golf, darts and shuffleboard is based on industry advice which is the same approach taken for the bowling. The indoor golf and associated facilities will complement the bowling and extend offer on an evening giving the opportunity to generate additional income to support the MTFP savings targets.
58. The table below provides an indication of the full year calculations for 26/27, although this will only be a part year given the construction timetable.

| Element | Cost per annum |
|---|----------------|
| Capital Costs | |
| Borrowing costs for capital costs to convert the area (£1.197M) and to fund the equipment (£0.259M). Total Capital cost = £1.456M. | £114,682* |
| Operating Costs | |
| Increased operating costs including salaries, security, R&M, consumables and licenses. | £93,143 |
| Revenue Income | |
| Change in revenue from the various gaming activities as outlined above plus food and beverage sales. | £255,298** |
| Surplus | £47,473 |
| *The capital is made up of costs for physical alterations to the building borrowed over 40 years and a cost for the equipment within the area that will require renewal and replacement over a shorter borrowing period of 5 years. | |
| **If the 55 games industry recommended average per day at £7.20 average per individual was achieved the 26/27 income is estimated to be £273,004, which would generate a further £17,706 of surplus. | |

59. Subject to approval, it is proposed the capital works would be funded through prudential borrowing over the life of the asset at an estimated annual cost of £0.115M based on current borrowing costs; and the MTFP would be adjusted to reflect the

approval, including the projected income increases to cover the borrowing costs and return a surplus.

New Spinning Studio and Fitness Studio refurbishment.

60. The cost plan and business cases have been developed on retaining core membership and attracting new membership.
61. The table below provides an indication of the full year calculations for 26/27, although this will only be a part year given the construction timetable.

| Element | Cost per annum |
|--|-----------------|
| Capital Costs | |
| Borrowing costs for capital costs to convert the area (£680,880) and to fund the new spinning equipment (£71,500). Total Capital cost = £752,380. | £48,859* |
| Operating Costs | |
| Increased operating costs including R&M, consumables and licenses. No additional staff are assumed in this model. | £4,000 |
| Revenue Income | |
| Revenue from Memberships only assumed in increased income. No additional retail, refreshments or beverages have been assumed. | £201,600 |
| Surplus | £148,741 |
| *The capital is made up of costs for physical alterations to the building borrowed over 40 years and a cost for the equipment withing the area that will require renewal and replacement over a shorter borrowing period of 5 years. | |

62. Subject to approval, it is proposed the capital works would be funded through prudential borrowing over the life of the asset at an estimated annual cost of £0.049M based on current borrowing costs. The MTFP would be adjusted to reflect the approval, including the projected income increases to cover the borrowing costs and return a surplus.
63. Throughout the work period several facilities will be closed therefore there will be an impact. Members are asked to note that there will be a revenue pressure in financial year 2025/26 of £0.041M and £0.133M in 2026/27.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

64. There will be a positive impact on carbon emissions by reducing energy consumption as a result of the installation of 400 PVs on the roof, new CHP, LED light fittings in the building and new plant. However, the investment opportunities will intensify use of the centre and increase energy consumption.

Consultation

65. Initial consultation has taken place with groups who will be impacted during the works and those that will be displaced. A full communication plan will be developed to keep all customers and residents up to date on the project subject to approvals.

Appendix 1 - Concept Illustrations

Golf, Darts and Shuffleboard



Bistro



New Spinning Studio and proposed location in the centre



To be located in the circulation space next to the existing fitness studio



Appendix 2 - Programme and milestones

1. If approved, the programme of work is scheduled to commence in November 2025 and be delivered in two phases with planned completion September 2026. (38 weeks).

Phase 1 - November 2025 to July 2026 (24 weeks)

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Nov 25 to April 26 (20 weeks) | Existing fitness Studio refurbishment. Classes and activities will be moved to Central Hall during this period. |
| Nov 25 to May 26 (22 weeks) | New Spinning Studio area created as part of the invest to save option |
| Jan 26 to May 26 (16 weeks) | The Bistro will be closed for essential mechanical and electrical works. However, catering will still be provided in the soft play, bowling, 16 Horsemarket and temporary facilities within the Dolphin to minimise the impact. |
| Jan 26 to Mar 26 (7 weeks) | Poolside showers refurbishment. There will still be small provision within the village and customers will be well informed in advance. |
| Jan 26 to July 26 (24 weeks) | Indoor Golf and associated facilities as part of the invest to save option will be installed. Any regular bookings are being accommodated in other parts of the centre during the refurbishment and the team are working with customers on the long-term options for them at the centre. |
| Jan 26 to May 26 (16 weeks) | Offices will be closed to accommodate window replacement and essential works in plant Rms 9 and 10. Staff will be relocated within the building, but the town hall also being an option. |
| May 26 to Jul 26 (5 weeks) | Work will be completed on the outside plant that services the 2 nd floor kitchen. |

Phase 2 - May 2026 to September 2026 (14 weeks)

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| May 26 to Sep 26 (14 weeks) | Mechanical and Electrical works will take place in the Main Sports Hall. Events and bookings will not be possible during this period. Where possible customers will be signposted to Eastbourne Sports Complex although availability is limited during peak times. |
| May 26 to Sep 26 (14 weeks) | Mechanical and Electrical works will take place in Central Hall including Plant rooms 5 & 7. Events and bookings will not be possible during this period. |

2. There will need to be a small closure of the toddler pool currently anticipated in January 2026 to accommodate the installation of the gym windows, which will happen overnight to avoid disruption of gym members. This will be kept to a minimum and captured in the business disruption communications plan. Alternative provision will be made for toddlers during this period.
3. In addition to the above closures there will be work taking place throughout the building replacing the lighting and emergency lighting. The impact of this work will be kept to a minimum with the most impactful work taking place out of hours through the night.
4. The diving pool will be drained, and investigation works will take place to determine the repairs required. This will be built into the above programme.
5. There are a number of areas of the Dolphin Centre that will be closed and whilst every effort will be made to minimise these and offer alternative venues and continue to offer food and beverage there will be revenue implications. The detail of this is covered in the financial section of report.
6. Throughout the works the contractor will need a compound in close proximity to the area of work within the Dolphin centre. The compounds have been agreed with the highways team and will be located as follows: -
 - a) Compound 1 - Feethams - Nov 25 to May 26
 - b) Compound 2 - Market Square – Nov 25 to Jun 26
 - c) Compound 3 - Bull Wynd - Apr 25 to Jul 26
 - d) Compound 4 - Houndgate – Oct 25 to Oct 26

A location plan for the compounds is below



COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE RESTORATION STRATEGY

Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio

Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Council approval of the combined Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy.

Summary

2. In May 2025, Council passed a resolution declaring a nature restoration emergency and combined it with the Council's existing climate change emergency.
3. We are also seeing that nature has become fragmented, demonstrating a need to rebuild the connectivity between habitats that has been lost.
4. We also need to create a wider variety of habitats in Darlington, increasing the resilience of our wildlife to climate change, human pressures and natural threats.
5. The attached strategy (**Appendix A**) sets out our approach to dealing with the challenge of both emergencies.
6. The target of a net zero Council by 2040 remains.
7. Separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration.
8. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be expanded to also provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
9. The 6-monthly climate change progress reports will expand to include reporting on the nature restoration actions.
10. The strategy and supporting action plans will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date.

Recommendations

11. Council approves the adoption of the attached Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy

Reasons

12. The recommendations are supported by the increasing public pressure to act on climate change and on nature loss, we run the risk of significant damage to our reputation if we do not deliver on our stated commitments.

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 and nature restoration 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 turn leads to better educational attainment and job prospects.</p> |
| Addressing inequalities | <p>Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. This strategy sets out how we will approach reducing our carbon emissions and adapting our services to the unavoidable effects of climate change.</p> <p>An improved natural environment will ensure that all Darlington residents will have access to good quality green space.</p> |
| Tackling Climate Change | <p>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.</p> |
| Efficient and effective use of resources | <p>Our approach to reducing emissions will mean that resources are used more efficiently.</p> |
| Health and Wellbeing | <p>According to the WHO, climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. This strategy sets out how we will approach reducing carbon and adapting our services, to ensure that the Council can continue to support and provide services to Darlington's residents.</p> <p>Access to good quality natural environment is also well documented as supporting strong physical and mental wellbeing.</p> |
| S17 Crime and Disorder | <p>There is no expected impact on Crime and Disorder in Darlington.</p> |
| Wards Affected | <p>This strategy covers how the Council will address its own carbon emissions and resilience, and how it will approach nature restoration. It will not affect any particular ward.</p> |
| Groups Affected | <p>This strategy covers how the Council will address its own carbon emissions and resilience, and how it will approach nature restoration. It will not affect any particular group.</p> |
| Budget and Policy Framework | <p>This report does not represent a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.</p> |
| Key Decision | No |

| | |
|--|----|
| Urgent Decision | No |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | No |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

13. In May 2025, Council passed a resolution declaring a nature restoration emergency and combined it with the Council's existing climate change emergency.
14. The predicted impacts of climate change in Darlington include more frequent and intense flooding, drought, episodes of extreme heat and stormier conditions. These impacts are expected to lead to an increase in heat-related deaths, particularly amongst the elderly, damage to essential infrastructure, reduced availability of drinking water, increased cost and scarcity of food, disruption to supply chains and service provision, sea level rises, greater coastal erosion and impact on habitats from rising temperature and weather events and from invasive species.
15. At the same time, the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Since the industrial revolution, we have already lost half of all animals, plants and birds because of intensive agriculture, habitat depletion and climate change.
16. We are also seeing that nature has become fragmented, demonstrating a need to rebuild the connectivity between habitats that has been lost.
17. We also need to create a wider variety of habitats in Darlington, increasing the resilience of our wildlife to climate change, human pressures and natural threats.
18. The links between climate change and nature restoration are clear, and the attached strategy (Appendix A) sets out our approach to dealing with the challenge of both emergencies.

Climate change

19. The target of a net zero Council by 2040 remains.
20. The scope of our climate change reporting remains concentrated on those emissions we can measure and have direct control over.
21. However, we do have a responsibility, as a leader in the borough, to support and encourage others to take action themselves. The wider borough emissions will continue to be monitored and reported, using data from central government.
22. Five principles are set out, which underpin the actions we will take towards our climate change commitments:
 - a. Reduce our overall energy consumption
 - i. Increase the efficiency of our estate

- ii. Proactively manage our buildings to reduce energy demand
 - iii. Train staff to be carbon literate so they change their behaviours
- b. Reduce our demand for fossil fuel-based energy
 - i. Move away from gas heating
 - ii. Increase on site renewables
 - iii. Support renewables with batteries
- c. Contribute to a greener grid
 - i. Increase off-site renewables
- d. Sequester carbon
 - i. offsetting only residual emissions after all efforts to reduce are taken.
- e. Adaptation
 - i. Ensure the Council adapts its services to climate change.
 - ii. Signpost businesses to information on how they can adapt.
 - iii. Support residents in simple changes they can make

Nature restoration

23. Five principles are set out, which underpin the actions we will take towards our nature restoration commitments:

- f. Improve the connectivity of habitats through the creation and/or enhancement of wildlife corridors and stepping stones.
 - i. Identify and map key areas where green corridors can be either enhanced or created
 - ii. where a continuous corridor is not possible, create stepping stones for wildlife.
 - iii. update Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013 – 2026 to reflect the current state of Darlington and the need to enhance and create wildlife corridors.
- g. Increase the resilience of natural environments
 - i. Create and/or enhance wildlife corridors and stepping stones
 - ii. Create a range of diverse habitats
 - iii. Increase the size and quality of habitats
- h. Halt and reverse biodiversity decline
 - i. Deliver targets in Darlington Borough Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy
 - ii. Create or restore alternative carbon sinks, such as wildflower meadows, grassland, and freshwater bodies and associated habitats
- i. Ensure all developments in Darlington are designed for nature and climate
 - i. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are the preferred approach to managing surface water runoff from hard surfaces.
 - ii. Encourage the installation of wildlife features, such as swift, hedgehog

and bee bricks, nest boxes and hedgehog highways within the landscaping plans.

- j. Review the environmental management practices within the council's owned land.
- 24. Separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration.
- 25. The current climate change action plan is being reviewed. New actions will replace the completed ones and actions that better sit within the nature restoration action plan will move across.
- 26. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be expanded to also provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
- 27. The 6-monthly climate change progress reports will expand to include reporting on the nature restoration actions, once that action plan has been developed.
- 28. The action plans are likely to be rolling 3–5-year plans. These and the strategy will be reviewed regularly to take advantage of updates in government policy, examples of good practice and new technologies.

Financial Implications

- 29. The attached strategy sets out our approach to meeting both our climate change and nature restoration commitments. Work has been undertaken concerning the climate change strategy financial impact, however this has been ongoing as technology and new initiatives have been explored. Further work will therefore be undertaken to understand the anticipated costs of both strategies.
- 30. There are expected additional future costs related to habitat development and climate change, however some of these will be offset by energy efficiency measures and there will be opportunities to generate income, for example through biodiversity credits.
- 31. Any additional costs of implementing the strategy will be included with the normal budget setting process through the MTFP or will be presented to Cabinet as initiatives arise.

Legal Implications

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

Estates and Property Advice

33. As the strategy will impact on all council activities, it may also affect Council's land holdings and management of council land.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

34. Climate change is a corporate priority. It affects everyone but has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. By ensuring the Council is resilient to the effects of climate change, we ensure that we will be able to continue providing services to all residents. Public scrutiny in this area is growing, and we should consider and set out the climate impacts of decisions.

Equalities considerations

35. 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

36. This strategy relates to reducing the Council carbon emissions, increasing its resilience to the impacts of climate change and how we intend to proceed with nature restoration. No public consultation has been carried out.

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Foreword



Councillor Chris McEwan
Deputy Leader of Darlington Borough Council
Economy Portfolio Holder

Climate change and nature loss are no longer distant threats: they are here, and they are deepening the divide in our communities. In Darlington, where some of the UK's most disadvantaged areas are found, the impacts of extreme weather, rising energy costs, and environmental damage are felt most acutely by those least able to adapt.

At the same time, our natural environment, already under pressure, is facing unprecedented threats. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. This is not just an ecological crisis; it is a social and economic one too.

But there is hope. And there is opportunity.

In 2023, Darlington Borough Council brought forward its net zero target to 2040, recognising the urgency of the climate crisis. Now, we are also declaring a nature restoration emergency, acknowledging that climate and nature are inextricably linked—and must be tackled together.

While the Council directly controls less than 5% of the Borough's emissions and just 13.5 km² of land, our influence is far greater. We can lead by example, convene partnerships, and empower our residents, businesses, and young people to be part of the solution.

By embedding climate and nature action into everything we do, we can build resilience in our most vulnerable communities, reducing flood risk, improving air quality, and creating cooler, greener neighbourhoods. These actions will not only protect lives and livelihoods but also support a healthier, more connected society.

At the same time, we can stimulate our local economy by creating green jobs and developing skills that support a just transition. Investing in energy efficiency, sustainable transport, and nature-based solutions will unlock long-term savings and reduce future costs to public services. These are not just environmental investments—they are economic ones that align with our aspirations for financial growth and prosperity.

We are committed to engaging young people in shaping the future they will inherit, partnering with businesses and academic institutions to drive innovation, and supporting residents with the information and tools they need to make sustainable choices.

This is about more than targets. It's about securing a better future for our children and grandchildren—one that is fairer, greener, and more prosperous for all. Together, we can make Darlington a beacon of resilience and regeneration.

Introduction

1. The 2023 report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for everyone.
2. Human activity has led to approximately 1.5°C of global warming since the Industrial Revolution, which is causing damaging impacts on lives, infrastructure and ecosystems that are apparent today. As a result, we need to both rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
3. The predicted impacts of climate change in Darlington include:
 - a. more frequent and intense flooding,
 - b. drought,
 - c. episodes of extreme heat and stormier conditions.
4. These impacts are expected to lead to:
 - a. an increase in heat-related deaths, particularly amongst the elderly,
 - b. damage to essential infrastructure,
 - c. reduced availability of drinking water,
 - d. increased cost and scarcity of food,
 - e. disruption to supply chains and service provision, and
 - f. impacts on habitats from rising temperature, weather events and from invasive species.
5. Similarly, since the Industrial Revolution, the UK has lost half of all animals, plants and birds because of agriculture, habitat depletion and climate change.
6. Nature provides vital services to us: the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. Nature provides cooling, carbon storage, energy, medicines, and cultural and recreational experiences.
7. Consequently, the Council has declared a nature restoration emergency alongside its existing climate emergency. The two sit alongside each other and cross-over in multiple respects.
8. We therefore have a combined strategy but will have separate action plans. These action plans will have clear indication where an action meets both climate and nature targets.
9. The Council has been on a mission to reduce its emissions since 2010. The actions we have taken so far have successfully reduced the Council's carbon emissions by around 50% (as of 2024/25). Despite these successes, we understand that we need to lead by example and do more, faster.
10. Our more ambitious targets, however, do come with potential pressure on our finances, and we must be mindful of that. At the same time, we must recognise that preventative action will cost less than reactive action in the future.
11. This strategy focuses on our plans to tackle both the climate change emergency and the nature restoration emergency. It includes the principles we have put in place to support the actions we need to take.

12. Alongside the work we are doing internally, we must use our position as a leader in the Borough to help everyone join us on the journey to become a resilient Darlington. Our most vulnerable residents are at greatest risk; climate change has the most impact on those least able to do anything about it. Nature is one of the mechanisms that can help reduce risk. For example, trees and hedgerows decrease risk of flooding, while a natural canopy can reduce the risk of overheating. Furthermore, access to nature is a well-documented path to improved wellbeing. Therefore, our approach will be centred around creating a future that is healthier and safer for *all*.
13. The strategy will be reviewed regularly so that we can embrace improvements in technology and any changes in government policy.

Managing the Council's own emissions

Principles for action

14. There are five core principles which underpin the climate actions within this strategy and are critical to our successful delivery of our goal of reducing emissions and being more resilient. These principles should be considered as an overarching hierarchy for action, and will set the direction for future work, and determine which actions are brought forward first.
15. The actions we choose to take will also see co-benefits, such as cleaner air and improved health and wellbeing. We must ensure that we identify and account for these additional gains, as well as ensuring that whatever actions we take are fair and equitable for all residents.
 - a. Reduce our overall energy consumption
 - i. Increase the efficiency of our estate.
 - ii. Proactively manage our buildings to reduce energy demand.
 - iii. Train staff to be carbon literate so they change their behaviours.
 - b. Reduce our demand for fossil fuel-based energy.
 - i. Move away from gas heating.
 - ii. Increase on site renewables.
 - iii. Support renewables with batteries.
 - c. Contribute to a greener grid
 - i. Increase off-site renewables.
 - d. Sequester carbon
 - i. Offsetting only residual emissions after all efforts to reduce are taken.
 - e. Adaptation
 - i. Ensure the Council adapts its services to climate change.
 - ii. Signpost businesses to information on how they can adapt.
 - iii. Support residents in simple changes they can make.

Managing the Council's nature restoration emergency

Principles for action

16. There are five key principles which underpin the nature actions within this strategy which will ensure an improvement in the natural environment in Darlington and see an increase in species recovery. Professor Sir John Lawton identified the need for connectivity and diversity in our natural environment in 2010¹ and that still holds true today.
- a. Improve the connectivity of habitats through the creation and/or enhancement of wildlife corridors and stepping-stones.
 - i. Identify and map key areas where green corridors can be either enhanced or created.
 - ii. Where a continuous corridor is not possible, create stepping-stones for wildlife.
 - iii. Update Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013 – 2026 to reflect the current state of Darlington and the need to enhance and create wildlife corridors.
 - b. Increase the resilience of natural environments
 - i. Create and/or enhance wildlife corridors and stepping-stones.
 - ii. Create a range of diverse habitats.
 - iii. Increase the size and quality of habitats.
 - c. Halt and reverse biodiversity decline
 - i. Deliver targets in Darlington Borough Council's [Tree and Woodland Strategy](#).
 - ii. Create or restore alternative carbon sinks, such as wildflower meadows, grassland, and freshwater bodies and associated habitats.
 - d. Ensure all developments in Darlington are designed for nature and climate
 - i. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are the preferred approach to managing surface water runoff from hard surfaces.
 - ii. Encourage the installation of wildlife features, such as swift, hedgehog and bee bricks, nest boxes and hedgehog highways within the landscaping plans.
 - e. Review the environmental management practices within the council's owned land.

Methodology

17. Our climate change target concentrates on those emissions we can measure and have direct control over.
18. The carbon footprint has been built from numerous data sources, with a specified calculation methodology applied to each.
19. Our nature restoration emergency will use data from the Tees Valley Nature Partnerships Natural Capital Report for our baseline.

Our target

1

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268279426_Making_Space_for_Nature_A_Review_of_England's_Wildlife_Sites_and_Ecological_Network

20. The Council will achieve net zero carbon emissions across our own estate by 2040.

21. The Council will set clear strategic goals for nature recovery by 2040.

Scope

22. Carbon reporting includes areas where carbon emissions are significant, where there is the ability to control and directly influence, to deliver change, and where there is robust data to demonstrate progress.

23. The nature restoration emergency will review the Council's environmental management practices.

24. Both climate change and nature restoration emergencies require us to use our position as a leader in Darlington to influence wider action and activity.

Out of scope

25. Emissions from the following sources are currently excluded from carbon reporting due to lack of data:

- a. Energy use in Council housing where we do not retain responsibility for bill payment or management.
- b. Commuting.
- c. Disposal of waste from buildings.
- d. Business mileage using public transport.

26. The following areas are out of scope in our nature restoration plans:

- a. Private land where we have no control over management approach.
- b. Areas where we cannot control recreational activity.

Baseline

27. Our climate change baseline year is 2010/11 as that was the date of our original carbon reduction target and allows us to recognise work carried out from that date.

28. Our nature restoration baseline year is 2020, as we have used the Tees Valley Nature Partnership Natural Capital Account to establish baseline data.

Influencing externally

29. We have a leading role in the Borough, so we have a duty to work with and encourage businesses, third sector, and public sector organisations to reduce emissions, ensure they are adapted, and are taking account of the natural environment.

30. Equally, we must support our residents to do what they can to reduce their own emissions and become more resilient to the effects of climate change. Alongside this, we must encourage residents to do their part in increasing biodiversity in their own gardens and

stress the need to prevent damage while they are enjoying the wider environment.

Communication Plan

31. It is important that there are clear communications paths both internally and externally to inform, engage, and influence.
32. A communications plan will be developed with the Communications Team, using all mechanisms for engaging both with staff and councillors and engaging with businesses and residents. Two dedicated email addresses (climate@darlington.gov.uk & nature@darlington.gov.uk) have been set up.

Reporting

33. An annual report outlining the progress made against both climate and nature targets will be published on the Council's website.
34. Borough emissions are reported through our corporate targets and will be tracked against the government issued emissions inventory.

Governance

35. A strong and robust governance framework for this work is another critical success factor.
36. The scale and magnitude of the change required to deliver these targets means that overall responsibility needs to sit at the Executive Leadership Team level or above. However, a variety of key services need to own and drive forward this agenda. Lead Officers are tasked with delivering actions in their own department.

Existing Governance Arrangements

37. Within the Council, there are robust governance arrangements, both at an officer and member level. This governance structure enables oversight of both key decisions and significant actions, such as procurement and capital expenditure.
38. These existing mechanisms present an opportunity to ensure that alignment with the ambition and actions of this strategy are being realised. A Member-led Climate Change and Nature Restoration Working Group will be established to provide a regular review of activity.

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COUNCIL
02 OCTOBER 2025

TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND OUTTURN PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2024/25

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

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides important information regarding the regulation and management of the Council's borrowing, investments and cash-flow. It is a requirement of the Council's reporting procedures and by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review that covers treasury activity for 2024/25. The report also seeks approval of the Prudential Indicators results for 2024/25 in accordance with the Prudential Code.

Summary

2. The financial year 2024/25 was yet another unprecedented year with regards to treasury management. With the Ukraine conflict continuing, events in the Middle East, cost of living increases and inflation taking time to recover, the markets have been quite cautious. Interest rate forecasts initially suggested gradual reductions in short, medium and longer-term fixed borrowing rates. The bank rate peaked at 5.25% at the start of the year, but the initial expectation of significant rate reductions did not transpire, primarily because inflation concerns remained elevated. Forecasts were too optimistic from a rate reduction perspective, but more recently the forecasts from November 2024 onwards look more realistic. The market now expects the bank rate to fall to 3.75% by the end of December 2025. Although the returns for cash investments have remained favourable due to higher interest rates they remain below the cost of borrowing and these do decline at a much faster rate than the cost of borrowing.
3. During 2024/25 the Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements. The borrowing need (**Table 1**) was only increased for capital purposes.
4. At 31 March 2025 the Council's external debt was £172.738m which is £19.860m more than the previous year. This increase relates to the progression of various capital schemes and the rise in the costs of these schemes due to inflationary pressures. The average interest rate for borrowing increased from 2.65% in 2023/24 to 3.37% in 2024/25. Investments totalled £35.408m at 31 March 2025 (£31.136m at 31 March 2024) earning

interest of 4.94% on short term cash investments and 0.42% on Property Fund units net of costs.

5. Financing costs had an overspend of £0.324m mainly due to interest rates remaining higher for longer due to the economic climate. To offset this the Council has reduced borrowing as far as possible to minimise exposure to higher rates. Property fund dividend income has also decreased as the Lothbury property fund is wound up and its assets sold.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The outturn 2024/25 Prudential Indicators within this report and those in **Appendix 1** be noted.
 - (b) The Treasury Management Annual Report for 2024/25 be noted.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) In order to comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.
 - (b) To inform members of the Performance of the Treasury Management function.
 - (c) To comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director of Resources and Governance

Background Papers

- (i) Accounting Records
- (ii) Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25
- (iii) Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy Report 2024/25

Judith Murray: Extension 5204

| | |
|--|--|
| Council Plan | The Council's Treasury Management Strategy contributes to all priorities outlined within the Council Plan. |
| Addressing inequalities | There is no impact as a result of this report. |
| Tackling Climate Change | There is no impact as a result of this report. |
| Efficient and effective use of resources | The Council's Treasury Management Strategy contributes towards the efficient and effective use of resources. |
| Health and Well Being | This report has no implications for the Council's Health and Well Being agenda. |
| S17 Crime and Disorder | This report has no implications for S 17 Crime and Disorder. |
| Wards Affected | All Wards. |
| Groups Affected | All Groups. |
| Budget and Policy Framework | This report must be considered by Council. |
| Key Decision | This is not an executive decision. |
| Urgent Decision | For the purposes of call in this report is not an urgent decision. |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | This report does not impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers. |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. This report summarises:
 - (a) Capital expenditure and financing for 2024/25
 - (b) The Council's overall borrowing need
 - (c) Treasury position at 31 March 2025
 - (d) Prudential indicators and compliance issues
 - (e) The economic background for 2024/25
 - (f) A summary of the Treasury Management Strategy agreed for 2024/25
 - (g) Treasury Management activity during 2024/25
 - (h) Performance and risk benchmarking
9. Throughout this report a number of technical terms are used, a glossary of terms can be found at the end of this report.

The Council's Capital Expenditure and Financing 2024/25

10. The Council undertakes capital expenditure on long term assets, which is financed either:
 - (a) Immediately through capital receipts, capital grants, contributions and from revenue; or
 - (b) If insufficient financing is available, by borrowing.
11. Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address this borrowing need, either through borrowing from external bodies, or utilising temporary cash resources within the Council. The wider treasury activities also include managing the Council's cash flow, its previous borrowing activities and the investment of surplus funds. These activities are structured to manage risk foremost and then optimise performance.
12. Capital Expenditure forms one of the prudential indicators that are used to regulate treasury activity. Table 1 shows total capital expenditure and how this was financed, compared with what was expected to be spent and how this would have been financed. Actual expenditure was £16.982m less than planned, mostly down to slippage in the HRA, and some Towns Fund initiatives. As some of the HRA expenditure was to be financed by borrowing this has led to a decrease in borrowing needed of £10.220m.

Table 1 – Capital Expenditure and Financing

| | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | | |
|--|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Outturn £m | Revised Estimate £m | Outturn £m | Variance £m |
| General Fund Capital Expenditure | 39.361 | 20.876 | 24.086 | 3.210 |
| HRA Capital Expenditure | 13.753 | 43.032 | 21.998 | (21.044) |
| Loans to Joint Ventures etc | 7.450 | 5.738 | 6.590 | 0.852 |
| Total Capital Expenditure | 60.564 | 69.646 | 52.664 | (16.982) |
| Resourced by: | | | | |
| Capital Receipts GF | 2.491 | 0.887 | 3.145 | 2.258 |
| Capital receipts Housing | 0.000 | 0.000 | 2.663 | 2.663 |
| JV Loans Repaid | 0.500 | 1.000 | 3.820 | 2.820 |
| Capital Grants | 36.996 | 16.319 | 12.179 | (4.140) |
| Capital Contributions | 0.261 | 0.000 | 0.437 | 0.437 |
| Revenue Contributions - GF | 1.167 | 0.651 | 1.403 | 0.752 |
| Investment Fund - Housing | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Revenue Contributions - HRA | 8.003 | 25.007 | 13.455 | (11.552) |
| Total Resources | 49.418 | 43.864 | 37.102 | (6.762) |
| Borrowing needed to finance expenditure | 11.146 | 25.782 | 15.562 | (10.220) |

The Council's Overall Borrowing Need

13. The Council's underlying need to borrow is called the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The figure is a gauge for the Council's debt position. The CFR results from the capital activity of the Council and resources used to pay for the capital spend. It represents 2024/25 and prior years' net capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for by revenue or other resources.
14. Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address the funding requirements for this borrowing need. Depending on the capital expenditure programme, the treasury service organises the Council's cash position to ensure that sufficient cash is available to meet the capital plans and cash flow requirements. This may be sourced through borrowing from external bodies (such as the government, through Public Works Loan Board (PWLb), or the money markets) or utilising temporary cash resources within the Council.
15. The Council's (non HRA) underlying borrowing need (CFR) is not allowed to rise indefinitely. Statutory controls are in place to ensure that capital assets are broadly charged to revenue over the life of the asset. The Council is required to make an annual revenue charge, called the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), to reduce the CFR. This is effectively a repayment of the non-Housing Revenue Account borrowing need, (there is no statutory requirement to reduce the HRA CFR). This differs from the treasury management arrangements which ensure that cash is available to meet capital commitments. External debt can also be borrowed or repaid at any time, but this does not change the CFR.

16. The total CFR can be reduced each year through a Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP) or by the application of additional capital financing resources (such as unapplied capital receipts).
17. The Council's CFR for the year is shown in Table 2 and represents a key prudential indicator. The CFR outturn for 2024/25 is £247.613m which is £0.348m higher than approved due to an increase in estimated JV loan repayment of £2.820m and an increase in the borrowing requirement for Right of Use Assets. Right of Use Assets are a new statutory requirement and the extent to which this affected the CFR was not fully known until the Statement of Accounts was completed.

Table 2 - Capital Financing Requirement

| | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | | |
|---|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| | Outturn £m | Approved Indicator £m | 31 March Actual £m | Variance £m |
| Opening Balance | 228.659 | 233.973 | 233.973 | 0.000 |
| Add Capital Expenditure financed by borrowing | 11.645 | 19.078 | 19.382 | 0.304 |
| Right of Use Assets | 0.00 | 1.000 | 4.020 | 3.020 |
| Less repayment of JV loans | (0.500) | (1.000) | (3.820) | (2.820) |
| Less MRP/VRP GF | (4.299) | (4.254) | (4.417) | (0.163) |
| Less MRP/VRP Housing | (0.426) | (0.426) | (0.426) | 0.000 |
| Less MRP/VRP PFI | (1.106) | (1.106) | (1.099) | 0.007 |
| Closing balance | 233.973 | 247.265 | 247.613 | 0.348 |

Treasury Position at 31 March 2025

18. Whilst the measure of the Council's underlying need to borrow is the CFR, the Executive Director of Resources and Governance can manage the Council's actual borrowing position by:
- (a) Borrowing to the CFR level; or
 - (b) Choosing to utilise some temporary cash flows instead of borrowing ("under borrowing"); or
 - (c) Borrowing for future increases in CFR (borrowing in advance of need, the "over borrowed" amount can be invested).
19. The Council's treasury management debt and investment position is organised by the treasury management service in order to ensure adequate liquidity for revenue and capital activities, security for investments and to manage risks within all treasury management activities. Procedures and controls to achieve these objectives are well established both through member reporting and through officer activity detailed in the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

20. The Council's total debt outstanding at 31st March 2025 was £172.738m. In addition to this, a liability of £9.932m relating to the PFI scheme and Right of Use Assets brings the total to £182.670m. The Council's revised CFR position was estimated to be £247.265m, however, the actual out turn position was £247.613m. When comparing this to borrowing of £182.670m this meant that the Council was "under borrowed" by £64.943m. This "under borrowed" amount was financed by internal borrowing which means that the amount that could have been invested externally was reduced to cover this. The reduced under borrowed position still has the dual effect of reducing costs to the MTFP because borrowing costs are generally greater than investment returns and it reduces counterparty risk by reducing our exposure to banks and other financial institutions.
21. The treasury position at 31 March 2025, including investments compared with the previous year is shown in table 3 below.

Table 3 – Summary of Borrowing and Investments

| Treasury Position | 31 March 2024 | | 31 March 2025 | |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| | Principal £m | Average Rate % | Principal £m | Net Annualised Average Rate % |
| General Debt - Fixed Rate Debt, Market and Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) | 127.878 | 2.65% | 147.738 | 3.37% |
| Property Fund Borrowing | 25.000 | 2.60% | 25.000 | 3.70% |
| Total Debt | 152.878 | 2.61% | 172.738 | 3.41% |
| Cashflow Investments up to 6 months | 6.370 | 5.09% | 10.090 | 4.94% |
| Capital Investments over 6 months | 0.000 | 0.00% | 0.000 | 0.00% |
| Property Fund Investment - net of costs | 24.766 | 0.65% | 25.318 | 0.42% |
| Total Investments | 31.136 | | 35.408 | |
| Net borrowing position | 121.742 | | 137.330 | |

Prudential Indicators and Compliance Issues

22. Some prudential indicators provide an overview while others are specific limits on treasury activity. These indicators are shown below:
23. **Gross Borrowing and the CFR** – in order to ensure that borrowing levels are prudent over the medium term and only for a capital purpose, the Council should ensure that its gross external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the capital financing requirement in the preceding year (2023/24) plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current (2024/25) and next two financial years. This essentially means that the Council is not borrowing to support revenue expenditure. This indicator allowed the Council some flexibility to borrow in advance of its immediate capital

needs in 2024/25. The table below highlights the Council's gross borrowing position against the CFR. The Council has complied with this prudential indicator.

Table 4 – Gross Borrowing Compared with CFR

| | 31 March 2024 Actual £m | 31 March 2025 Approved Indicator £m | 31 March 2025 Actual £m |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Gross Borrowing Position | 152.878 | 171.411 | 172.738 |
| PFI and Right of Use Asset | 7.011 | 7.912 | 9.932 |
| Total | 159.889 | 179.323 | 182.670 |
| CFR | 233.973 | 247.265 | 247.613 |
| (Under)/over funding of CFR | (74.087) | (67.942) | (64.943) |

24. **The Authorised Limit** – The Authorised Limit is the “Affordable Borrowing Limit” required by section 3 of the Local Government Act 2003. The Council does not have power to borrow above this level.
25. **The Operational Boundary** – The Operational Boundary is the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year. Periods where the actual position is either below or over the Boundary are both acceptable, subject to the Authorised Limit not being breached.
26. **Actual financing costs as a proportion of net revenue expenditure** - This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income) against the net revenue expenditure. The actual for this indicator has risen from the previous year due to an increase in the Financing costs outturn.

Table 5 – Key Prudential Indicators

| | Actual 2023/24 £m | Original Approved Limits 2024/25 £m | Revised Approved Limits 2024/25 £m | Actual Total Liabilities Borrowing + PFI/ ROU Assets 2024/25 Maximum £m |
|---|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Approved Indicator – Authorised Limit | 245.675 | 273.111 | 259.628 | 259.994 |
| Approved Indicator – Operational Boundary | 159.889 | 183.973 | 179.323 | 182.670 |
| Financing costs as a percentage of net revenue expenditure | 4.47% | 4.16% | 4.10% | 3.91% |

27. At 31 March 2025 the total liabilities were £172.738m which is below both the approved Authorised Limit and the approved Operational Boundary. The Operational Boundary is the point at which we expect borrowing to be, but it can be lower or higher. Borrowing cannot exceed the Authorised Limit.
28. A further four prudential indicators are detailed in **Appendix 1**.

Economic Background for 2024/25

29. A summary of the general economic conditions that have prevailed through 2024/25 provided by MUFG, the Council's treasury management advisors is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Summary of the Treasury Management Strategy agreed for 2024/25

30. The revised Prudential Indicators anticipated that during 2024/25 the Council would need to borrow £25.782m to finance part of its capital programme, whereas the actual outturn figure was £15.562m. The reason for this change is slippage on housing schemes which will now be progressed into 2025/26.
31. The Annual Investment Strategy stated that the use of specified (usually less than one year) and non-specified (usually more than one year) investments would be carefully balanced to ensure that the Council has appropriate liquidity for its operational needs. In the normal course of the Council's business it is expected that both specified and non-specified investments will be utilised for the control of liquidity as both categories allow for short term investments.
32. Longer term instruments (greater than one year from inception to repayment) will only be used where the Council's liquidity requirements are safeguarded. An estimate of long term investments (over one year) were included in the report on the Prudential Indicators update these were as follows £50m for 2023/24 and £50m for 2024/25. No other investments of over one year duration have been made during 2024/25.

Treasury Management Activity during 2024/25

Borrowing Strategy

33. During 2024/25, the Council maintained an under-borrowed position. This meant that the capital borrowing need, (the CFR), was not fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow was used as an interim measure. This strategy was prudent as borrowing rates were higher than investment returns.
34. The Council has sought to minimise the taking of long-term borrowing at elevated interest rate levels and has focused on a policy of internal and temporary borrowing as appropriate whilst rates remain high.
35. A cost of carry remained during the year on any new long-term borrowing that was not immediately used to finance capital expenditure, as it would have caused a temporary increase in cash balances; this would have incurred a revenue cost – the difference between (higher) borrowing costs and (lower) investment returns.

36. The policy of avoiding new borrowing by running down spare cash balances has served well over the last few years (see table 6 below). However, this was kept under review to avoid incurring higher borrowing costs in the future when this authority may not be able to avoid new borrowing to finance capital expenditure and/or the refinancing of maturing debt.

Table 6 – net borrowing

| | Market Loans (incl. other Local Authorities) | | | Total |
|---------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| | Amount £m | Length of Loan | Interest Rate % | £m |
| New Loans Taken | 5.000 | 11 months | 5.30% | 47.000 |
| | 10.000 | 1 year | 4.90% | |
| | 2.000 | 9 months | 4.80% | |
| | 5.000 | 10 months | 4.95% | |
| | 5.000 | 9 months | 4.85% | |
| | 5.000 | 7 months | 5.70% | |
| | 10.000 | 1 year | 4.47% | |
| | 5.000 | 1 year | 4.41 | |
| Total New Loans | | | | 47.000 |
| Loans Repaid | (2.000) | 3 months | 6.00% | (27.000) |
| | (5.000) | 3 months | 6.75% | |
| | (3.000) | 4 months | 6.00% | |
| | (5.000) | 1 year | 5.25% | |
| | (2.000) | 6 months | 5.30% | |
| | (5.000) | 6 months | 5.30% | |
| | (5.000) | 6 months | 5.20% | |
| Total New Borrowing | | | | 20.000 |

37. **Summary of Debt Transactions** –The consolidated rate of interest increased from 2.65% to 3.37% due to increased interest rates in the market.

Investment Position

38. **Investment Policy** – the Council's investment policy for 2024/25 is governed by the MHCLG Guidance which has been implemented in the annual investment strategy for 2024/25 approved by Special Council on 15 February 2024. This policy sets out the approach for choosing investment counterparties, and is based on credit ratings provided

by the three main credit rating agencies, supplemented by additional market data, (such as rating outlooks, credit default swaps, bank share prices etc.).

39. The investment activity during the year conformed to the approved Strategy and the Council had no liquidity difficulties.
40. Investment returns remained robust throughout 2024/25 with the bank rate reducing steadily throughout the course of the financial year (three 0.25% rate cuts in total). The headline rate has reduced from 5.25% at the start of the year to 4.5% in March 2025.
41. Looking back to 2024/25 returns in excess of 5% for 1-12 month deposits were achievable but this decreased to around the 4-4.25% by the end of the financial year.
42. While the Council has taken a cautious approach to investing, it is also fully appreciative of changes to regulatory requirements for financial institutions in terms of additional capital and liquidity that came about in the aftermath of the financial crisis. These requirements have provided a far stronger basis for financial institutions, with annual stress tests by regulators evidencing how institutions are now far more able to cope with extreme stressed market and economic conditions.
43. Investment balances have been kept to a minimum through the agreed strategy of using reserves and balances to support internal borrowing, rather than borrowing externally from the financial markets. External borrowing would have incurred an additional cost, due to the differential between borrowing and investment rates. Such an approach has also provided benefits in terms of reducing counterparty risk exposure, by having fewer investments placed in the financial markets.
44. Investments held by the Council consist of temporary surplus balances, capital receipts and other funds. Cash balances are invested on a daily basis to maximise the benefit of temporary surplus funds. These include investments in Money Market Funds, the Government's Debt Management Office, other local authorities and bank short term notice accounts. Short term investments of up to a year earned interest of £779k on an average balance of £15.782m which equated to an annual average interest rate of 4.94%.
45. The Council also has longer term investments which consist of the property funds and the returns are shown below in **Table 7**.
46. The Council has received its share of the distributions of funds from the Lothbury Fund as and when assets are sold. Distributions which the Council have received to date have been invested in the UBS Triton Property fund. The investment of future distributions will be decided as and when they are received, in consideration of the best investment opportunities and the Council's financial position at the date of receipt.
47. As reported in the Council's Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy Report 2025/26 Hermes Federated were looking into a potential merger with another larger property fund. The Council awaits the decision on that merger and will report the outcome during 2025/26.

Table 7 – Longer Term 6 months to 5 years - Property Funds

| | Original Budget 2024/25 | Actual 2024/25 |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| Daily average level of Investments | £24.766m | £25.318m |
| Interest earned (gross) | 1.086m | 1.032m |
| Average Rate of Return on Investment Interest earned (gross) | 4.38% | 4.08% |
| Average Rate of Return on Investment (net of costs) | 0.65% | 0.42% |

Performance and Risk Benchmarking

48. A regulatory development is the consideration and approval of security and liquidity benchmarks. Yield benchmarks are currently widely used to assess investment performance.
49. The following reports the current position against the benchmarks originally approved.
50. Security – The Council’s maximum security risk benchmarks for the current portfolio of investments, when compared to historic default tables was set as follows:

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

51. **Table 8** shows that there has been a fluctuation in the historic levels of default over the year although still well below the benchmark. This is mainly due to some longer term investments actually being made for shorter terms i.e. up to six months rather than one year as these investments were a better fit with how the Council was expecting to utilise investments. It also shows more emphasis being placed on counterparties with a higher credit rating.
52. The investment portfolio was maintained within this overall benchmark during this year as shown in **Table 8**.

Table 8

| Maximum | Benchmark 2024/25 | Actual June 2024 | Actual October 2024 | Actual December 2024 | Actual March 2025 |
|----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Year 1 | 0.077% | 0.004% | 0.005% | 0.005% | 0.000% |

53. The counterparties that we use are all high rated therefore our actual risk of default based on the ratings attached to counterparties is virtually nil.
54. Liquidity – In respect of this area the Council set liquidity facilities/benchmark to maintain

- (a) Bank Overdraft £0.100M
- (b) Liquid short term deposits of at least £3.000M available within a week's notice.
- (c) Weighted Average Life benchmark is expected to be 146 days with a maximum of one year.

55. Liquidity arrangements have been adequate for the year to date as shown in **Table 9**.

Table 9

| | Benchmark | Actual June 2024 | Actual October 2024 | Actual December 2024 | Actual March 2025 |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Weighted Average life | 146 days to 1 year | 92 days | 71 days | 117 days | 0 days |

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

57. Money Market Funds do not have a Weighted Average Life as they are on a call basis. During the latter part of the year the Council held it's surplus cash in Money Market Funds as the rates for these were on par (sometimes even better) than short term investments, hence there is no Weighted Average Life in March 2025.

58. Yield - In respect of this area performance indicators relating to interest rates for borrowing and investments were set with reference to comparative interest rates. For borrowing, the indicator is the average rate paid during the year compared with the previous year. Investment rates are compared with a representative set of comparative rates.

Risk

59. The Council's treasury management activities are regulated by a variety of professional codes, statutes and guidance:-

- (a) The Local Government Act 2003(the Act), which provides the powers to borrow and invest as well as providing controls and limits on this activity.
- (b) The Act permits the Secretary of State to set limits either on the Council or nationally on all local authorities restricting the amount of borrowing which may be undertaken (although no restrictions were made in 2024/25).
- (c) Statutory Instrument (SI) 3146 2003, as amended, develops the controls and powers within the Act.
- (d) The SI requires the Council to undertake any borrowing activity with regard to the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

- (e) The SI also requires the Council to operate the overall treasury function with regard to the CIPFA code of Practice for Treasury Management in Public Services.
 - (f) Under the Act the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities has issued Investment Guidance to structure and regulate the Council's investment activities.
 - (g) Under section 238(2) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 the Secretary of State has taken powers to issue guidance on accounting practices. Guidance on Minimum Revenue Provision was issued under this section on 8 November 2007.
60. The Council's Treasury Management function has complied with all of the relevant statutory and regulatory requirements, which limit the levels of risk associated with its treasury management activities. In particular its adoption and implementation of both the Prudential Code and the code of Practice for Treasury Management means both that its capital expenditure is prudent, affordable and sustainable and its treasury practices demonstrate a low risk approach.
61. Officers of the Council are aware of the risks of passive management of the treasury portfolio and, with the support of Link Group, the Council's advisers, have proactively managed the debt and investments over the year.

Treasury Management Budget

62. There are three main elements within the Treasury Management Budget:-
- (a) Long Term capital investments including Property Funds which earns interest and dividends, this comprises of the Council's revenue and capital balances, unused capital receipts, reserves and provisions.
 - (b) Cash flow interest earned – the authority has consistently had positive cash flow. Unlike long term capital investments it does not represent any particular sum but it is the consequence of many different influences such as receipts of grants, the relationship between debtors and creditors, cashing of cheques and payments to suppliers.
 - (c) Debt servicing costs – This is the principal and interest costs on the Council's long term debt to finance the capital programme.

Table 10 - Changes to the Treasury Management Budget 2024/25

| | £m | £m |
|---|----------------|--------------|
| Original Treasury Management Budget | | 3.547 |
| Debt | | |
| Movements in interest payable on debt | 0.374 | |
| | | |
| Investments | | |
| Movements in investment income | (0.104) | |
| Movements in property fund dividend | 0.054 | |
| | | |
| Outturn Treasury Management Budget 2024/25 | | 3.871 |

63. The estimated reduction in the interest rates payable on debt was far slower to materialise than originally estimated. Interest rates have remained higher for longer due to economic factors beyond the Council's control and therefore interest payable was more than originally forecast. The Council has also increased its level of debt which has increased interest payable.
64. The Council have been able to take advantage of the higher interest rates by investing any surplus cash and have therefore been able to partially offset the increased interest payable by an increase in interest receivable.
65. The decrease in property fund dividend is due to the termination of the Lothbury Property Fund and the decreased level of dividends as assets are sold.

Conclusion

66. The Council's treasury management activity during 2024/25 has been carried out in accordance with Council Policy and within legal limits. The financial year has remained very volatile with interest rates not falling as quickly as expected leading to pressures on the treasury management budget. Interest rates cuts are expected to be gradual over 2025/26 with any real reduction in rates not expected to take place until the latter part of the financial year.

Outcome of Consultation

67. No formal consultation has been undertaken regarding this report.

Appendix 1

Additional Prudential Indicators not reported in the body of the report.

| | | 2023/24 Actual | 2024/25 Approved Indicator | 2024/25 Outturn |
|----------|--|---------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | limits on fixed interest rates | 79% | 100% | 70% |
| 2 | limits on variable interest rates | 21% | 40% | 30% |
| 3 | Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing (upper Limit) | | | |
| | Under 12 months | 21% | 40% | 30% |
| | 12 months to 2 years | 21% | 50% | 30% |
| | 2 years to 5 years | 26% | 60% | 39% |
| | 5 years to 10 years | 31% | 80% | 40% |
| | 10 years and above | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| 4 | Maximum Principal funds invested greater than 364 days | £50m | £50m | £50m |

The Economy and Interest Rates

UK. Economy.

UK inflation has proved somewhat stubborn throughout 2024/25. Having started the financial year at 2.3% y/y (April), the CPI measure of inflation briefly dipped to 1.7% y/y in September before picking up pace again in the latter months. The latest data shows CPI rising by 2.8% y/y (February), but there is a strong likelihood that figure will increase to at least 3.5% by the Autumn of 2025.

Against that backdrop, and the continued lack of progress in ending the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the potentially negative implications for global growth as a consequence of the implementation of US tariff policies by US President Trump in April 2025, Bank Rate reductions have been limited. Bank Rate currently stands at 4.5%, despite the Office for Budget Responsibility reducing its 2025 GDP forecast for the UK economy to only 1% (previously 2% in October).

Moreover, borrowing has becoming increasingly expensive in 2024/25. Gilt yields rose significantly in the wake of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, and the loosening of fiscal policy, and have remained elevated ever since, as dampened growth expectations and the minimal budget contingency (<£10bn) have stoked market fears that increased levels of borrowing will need to be funded during 2025.

The Bank of England sprung no surprises in their March meeting, leaving Bank Rate unchanged at 4.5% by a vote of 8-1, but suggesting further reductions would be gradual. The Bank of England was always going to continue its cut-hold-cut-hold pattern by leaving interest rates at 4.50% but, in the opposite of what happened at the February meeting, the vote was more hawkish than expected. This suggested that as inflation rises later in the year, the Bank cuts rates even slower, but the initial impact of President Trump's tariff policies in April 2025 on the financial markets underpin our view that the Bank will eventually reduce rates to 3.50%.

Having said that, the Bank still thinks inflation will rise from 2.8% in February to 3¾% in Q3. And while in February it said "inflation is expected to fall back thereafter to around the 2% target", this time it just said it would "fall back thereafter". That may be a sign that the Bank is getting a bit more worried about the "persistence in domestic wages and prices, including from second-round effects". Accordingly, although we expect a series of rate cuts over the next year or so, that does not contradict the Bank taking "a gradual and careful" approach to cutting rates, but a tepid economy will probably reduce inflation further ahead and prompt the Bank to cut at regular intervals.

From a fiscal perspective, the increase in businesses' national insurance and national minimum wage costs from April 2025 is likely to prove a headwind, although in the near-term the Government's efforts to provide 300,000 new homes in each year of the current Parliament is likely to ensure building industry employees are well remunerated, as will the clamp-down on immigration and the generally high levels of sickness amongst the British workforce. Currently

wages continue to increase at a rate close to 6% y/y. The MPC would prefer a more sustainable level of c3.5%.

As for equity markets, the FTSE 100 has recently fallen back to 7,700 having hit an all-time intra-day high 8,908 as recently as 3rd March. The £ has also endured a topsy-turvy time, hitting a peak of \$1.34 before dropping to \$1.22 in January and then reaching \$1.27 in early April 2025.

USA. Economy

Despite the markets willing the FOMC to repeat the rate cut medicine of 2024 (100 basis points in total), the Fed Chair, Jay Powell, has suggested that the Fed. Funds Rate will remain anchored at 4.25%-4.5% until inflation is under control, and/or the economy looks like it may head into recession as a consequence of President Trump's tariff policies.

Inflation is close to 3% and annualised growth for Q4 2024 was 2.4%. With unemployment just above 4%, and tax cuts in the pipeline, the FOMC is unlikely to be in a hurry to cut rates, at least for now.

EU. Economy

The Eurozone economy has struggled throughout 2024 and is flat lining at present, although there is the promise of substantial expenditure on German defence/infrastructure over the coming years, which would see a fiscal loosening. France has struggled against a difficult political backdrop, but with a large budget deficit it is difficult to see any turn-around in economic hopes in the near-term.

With GDP currently below 1% in the Euro-zone, the ECB is likely to continue to cut rates, although the headline inflation rate is still above 2% (2.3% February 2025). Currently at 2.5%, a further reduction in the Deposit Rate to at least 2% is highly likely.

Other Issues

Throughout this report Right of Use Assets are referred to. The adoption of IFRS 16 – Leases became mandatory for all local authorities from 1st April 2024. It requires lessees to recognise most leases on their balance sheet, whereas the previous standard (IAS17) allowed for these leases to be treated as operating leases and therefore off-balance sheet.

The effect of IFRS 16 is to bring leases on balance sheet as our own assets and this therefore impacts on the Capital Finance Requirement (CFR) as there is an obligation to fund these assets. As payments are made this obligation decreases through the MRP contribution and reduces the balance on the CFR.

Glossary of Terms

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) | This is the Councils underlying need to borrow which can be traced back to the Councils Balance Sheet and the value of the Councils assets which have yet to be paid for. |
| Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) | Monies set aside from the revenue budget to repay accumulated debt. |
| Call | Investments that can be returned without a period of notice |
| Counterparty | Institutions, Banks etc. that with make investments or take out loans with. |
| Specified Investments | Investments in Banks and Building Societies with a high credit rating for periods of less than 1 year |
| Non-Specified Investments | Investments in un-rated Building Societies and any investments in Banks and Building Societies for more than 1 year. |
| Operational Liquidity | Working Cash flow |
| Authorised Limit | Maximum amount of borrowing that could be taken in total. |
| Operational Boundary | The expected amount of borrowing assumed in total. |
| PWLB | Public Works Loan Board. The Governments lending body to Local Authorities |
| Discount | Amount payable by the PWLB when loans are repaid if the current loan rate is less than the rate borne by the original debt |
| Yield Curve | Is a graph that shows the relationship between the interest rate paid and length of time to repayment of a loan. |
| Gilts | Government Borrowing Bonds |
| SONIA | The Sterling Overnight Index Average – generally a replacement set of indices (for LIBID) for those benchmarking their investments. |
| Spreads | The difference between the highest rate of interest and the lowest rate of interest earned/charged on any one particular maturity period i.e. 1 year, 2 year 5 year etc. |
| LIBID | London Interbank Bid Rate. The average rate at which a bank is willing to borrow from another bank. |

| | |
|-------|---|
| LIBOR | London Interbank Offer Rate. The average rate at which a bank is willing to lend to another bank. LIBOR is always higher than the corresponding bid rate and the difference between the two rates is known as the spread. |
|-------|---|

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Report

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

TVCA Transport Portfolio Update

2. As the TVCA Cabinet member with responsibility for transport the following sections provide a general update on elements of the portfolio relevant to Darlington.

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Funding 2022/23 to 2026/27.

3. Design and development work is ongoing for the active mode and bus priority elements of the programme across the Tees Valley. For Darlington:-
 - i. Design work is complete for phase 2 of Woodland Road Walking and Cycling improvements and construction is anticipated to start later this year.
 - ii. Traffic modelling is underway for Bus Corridor improvements on the North Road, McMullen Road and A68 corridors.
 - iii. Work is at an advanced stage on accessibility improvements to North Road station to complement the investment made to Hopetown and the improved station entrance. The work will commence later this year, following the S&DR200 bi-centenary events.
 - iv. Delivery of the Darlington Station project continues to progress. Network Rail and TVCA are reporting some impact to the programme. It is anticipated that the revised entry into service date will be Spring 2026.

Transport for City Regions (TCR) Funding

4. TVCA has been allocated £978m through the Transport for City Regions (TCR) programme between 2027-28 to 2031-32. In January 2024, TVCA Cabinet approved a programme of projects and initiatives. Guidance on the fund has been recently published by Government and TVCA are assessing the guidance in developing the approved schemes.
5. As part of the programme TVCA Cabinet approved £250m for delivery of the Darlington Northern Link Road. Due to the time elapsed since this Link Road was last considered TVCA are undertaking a review of all route options. TVCA have commissioned consultants to undertake this review, and that work is ongoing and has yet to conclude.

Public Transport

Supported Services

6. All the supported services, including Tees Flex, have been extended until March 2026. TVCA are currently working with the local operators and local authorities to review the supported service network which will help determine procurements from March 2026 onwards. TVCA have not received confirmation of any further funding allocations at this point in time.

Bus stop improvements

7. TVCA have surveyed approximately 3,700 bus stop sites across the Tees Valley.
8. The survey is to help understand conditions across the network and also the level of work and investment required. This will inform a programme of shelter/stop programme of works to improve and standardise facilities.

Fare offers

9. Work continues to provide a fare offer care leavers across the Tees Valley. The 5 Local Authorities are working with TVCA to support the implementation of this scheme.

Climate Change

10. The Cross Party Climate Change Working Group met on 12 September, where the Assistant Director of Housing & Revenues discussed the work that has been carried out on our council house stock to deliver the housing services climate change strategy.

External Meetings and Engagement

ZIGUP plc

11. ZIGUP have received the very prestigious King's Award for Enterprise. Along with Cllr Chris McEwan, Andrew Perkin & Sarah Travers, I visited them to congratulate them on this achievement.

Lord Lieutenants Visit

12. As the Lord Lieutenant approaches her retirement, she spent a day in Darlington. Her visited included Darlington By The Sea, speaking to families and stall holders ; as well as Hopetown and the Library.
13. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are some of the meetings and events I have attended:
 - (a) Various Cabinet and Transport meetings at the TVCA
 - (b) Cummins International Delegation Visit

- (c) Visit to Historic Blackwell Parkland
- (d) Tees Valley Labour Leaders Meeting
- (e) Lola McEvoy MP briefing
- (f) Visit to Amazon
- (g) Rail North Committee Meeting
- (h) LGA & North East
- (i) Climate Change Cross Party Working Group
- (j) Darlington Neighbourhood Board
- (k) Gavin Foster – Editor, Northern Echo
- (l) Darlington Health & Wellbeing Board
- (m) Hitachi Rail Gala Dinner
- (n) ANEC Leaders and Elected Mayors' Group meeting

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO

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

Environmental Health

2. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 1,313 requests for service in Quarter 1 2025/2026.

The main categories of these requests are:

- (a) Food 126
- (b) Licensing 94
- (c) Noise 282
- (d) Planning Enquiries 91
- (e) Refuse 94
- (f) Pests 208
- (g) Personal searches 210

3. The food safety team have taken part in a regional food sampling programme that looked at undeclared food allergies present in meals sold from catering and retail premises. The survey revealed a significant improvement in failure rates compared to a similar survey carried out in 2023. Of the 180 samples taken throughout the region, 31 had been contaminated with a known allergen - with dairy contamination in non-dairy foods and peanuts in peanut free meals being the most frequent offenders. This is compared to 41 failures of 122 samples being contaminated in 2023.
4. The Air Quality Annual Status Report which was submitted to Defra in June has been approved and positive feedback received.

Climate Change

5. We have again been asked to take part in a government trial, in this case for Defra's local authority climate and health risk and adaptation tool (LARA). The Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer coordinated responses from a number of teams, and we are grateful for their support. The exercise highlighted some areas where we could improve our adaptation response to heat risk, and this will be included in the next iteration of the climate change action plan.
6. Following the declaration of a nature recovery emergency at May's Council, a climate change and nature strategy was put before Cabinet in September. The climate change action plan is already being revised and a new nature recovery action plan will be produced in due course.

Building Control

7. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
8. KPI returns for the second reporting quarter have been submitted to The Building Safety Regulator. Monitoring is ongoing and further returns will be submitted throughout 2025. The Building Control team continue to work hard towards preparing all relevant reports to be submitted to the BSR.
9. The Building Safety Regulator inspection audit of the DBC Building Control service has begun and is in progress. This has imposed some strain on the resources available, but we continue to meet all our responsibilities whilst upholding the service delivery.
10. The government's Building Safety Levy implementation is due to go live in autumn 2026. Building Control will be the collectors and administrators within DBC. The Building Control team are taking every opportunity to learn more about the expectations from MHCLG. Further work will be required to ascertain exact requirements for resourcing and implementation of systems and processes to support Levy collection as we approach the implementation date.
11. Dangerous structures reporting has settled after a surge at the beginning of the year. We continue to follow up reports of dangerous structures and ensure any dangers are removed. We have continued to monitor some of the more contentious problem buildings around the borough, as follows:
 - (a) Working with building managers and the owner to follow up any reports of dangers in relation to Northgate House.

Development Management

12. As Members are aware the application for the New Treasury Building has now been granted planning permission by the Council following a formal announcement from the Government. Further discussions have been had with the applicant's agent to further improve the design of the scheme. These discussions have been productive and are now complete. The Section 106 legal agreement is complete and planning permission was granted in May of this year. The applicant has submitted applications to discharge pre-commencement conditions and the developer, Keir, has indicated that enabling works for the development will start imminently.
13. There has been an occupation incident by travellers adjacent to an existing traveller site in the Borough. The matter has been reported to the Planning Applications Committee and the appropriate mechanism to deal with the matter has been instigated through the Court. By way of an update Officers attended the High Court in Newcastle and were successful in securing an interim injunction on 15th July 2025 to prevent the further preparation of the site for the occupation of travellers. Officers were further successful in securing a full injunction at the High Court on 15th August 2025 which remains in place until November 2026 (to allow the landowners to contest the injunction should they wish to do so). The full injunction prevents activities taking place relating to the preparation of the site for occupation, or the siting and occupation of caravans, mobile homes, vehicles or other chattels intended for temporary or permanent occupation.

14. Further work is being undertaken on the planning application for Drone delivery flights from the Amazon site in Darlington. Detailed discussions are taking place with the applicant, The Civil Aviation Authority and The Department of Transport. It is hoped that a positive position can be arrived at.

Business Investment

15. Business start-up and business growth enquiries continue.
16. Trade merchant Wolseley has taken 108,000 sq ft at the Greenbox Darlington logistics hub. The speculatively built logistics park was completed in March and comprises three grade A industrial units ranging from 85,000 sq ft to 215,000 sq ft. Wolseley, a merchant in plumbing, heating, cooling, and infrastructure trade, has taken space at Unit 2.
17. Martin Brower is recruiting staff for their new distribution centre in Darlington. The Business Investment Team are working with the recruitment agency and supporting the process.
18. The Business Investment Team are planning a significant event aimed at encouraging and inspiring young people to consider a career in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM). Destination STEM Hopetown - is being held at Hopetown, Darlington's award-winning railway-themed visitor attraction, where around 2000 local children aged between 10 and 13 years old, will visit the two-day event on 14 and 15 October, where more than forty employers will showcase the diverse range of STEM careers available across the region, using hands on interactive activities and engaging presentations and exhibitions. A diverse range of employers are being encouraged to attend, offering a unique opportunity to raise awareness of their business. It is also the perfect way for businesses to engage with future talent and to get involved in providing social value to their local communities.
19. The Business Team have been supporting the delivery of the Youth Trailblazer Programme through a range of business engagement activities. Funded by Tees Valley Combined Authority, this initiative is designed to help young people aged 18–21 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) gain valuable work experience. This new pilot initiative is offering paid work placements, flexible unpaid tasters, and one-to-one support to help young people gain skills, explore job options, and get into work, education or training.

Estates

20. The Council's newly appointed town centre development partner Cityheart are excited at the potential opportunities this partnership could deliver for Darlington and early positive discussions have now taken place. A further report to Cabinet outlining next steps will be presented in the Autumn.
21. Blackwell parkland continues to be source of colour and enjoyment for regular users and newcomers alike with positive feedback; the maintenance company for the parkland, Brambledown are carrying out regular inspections and can be contacted directly should

any issues arise. Unfortunately, there have been incidents of damage and vandalism to some of the internal fences which surround the wildflower meadows. and users of the parkland are encouraged to be vigilant and report any such damage to Brambledown. The 'Heritage Park' residential development by Homes by Esh is now well established with several of the new homes already occupied, adding to the appeal of this very attractive location.

22. The continued dry weather conditions has allowed infrastructure works at Burtree Garden Village which includes the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm to progress well and a decision on the Phase 1 reserved matters planning applications are expected shortly.
23. The former Cleveland Bridge site is soon to welcome a new occupier, Pyrol Ltd who will be operating a Pyrolosis Plant and will bring upwards of 150 direct jobs and 400 jobs in supporting businesses. It will be good to see this site brought back into operation.

Towns Fund

24. The Towns Fund Programme continues to deliver on its objectives with the public realm enhancements in Coniscliffe Road fully completed in June 2025. Shopfront works continue at pace on both Skinnergate and the Yards, and Victoria Road, with both schemes due to complete by the end of 2025.
25. Works to the former Northern Echo building are making good progress, with the ground floor Adult Skills facility likely to be operational in early 2026 and completion of the upper floors by the end of 2026.
26. Work has commenced on 156 Northgate to transform a historic building into quality office space; this is scheduled to complete by December 2025.
27. The tender for works to Edward Pease House is being considered and the specified works are proposed to start in Autumn 2025 with a completion target of January 2026.
28. Development of an urban green space on the disused site on Garden Street within the Linear Park project has commenced with an artist being appointed in March 2025 to begin research.
29. Initial demolition work has commenced on the properties next to Bank Top Station. The detailed design for the public realm scheme is being completed and TVCA anticipate the works will be complete by early 2026.

Planning Policy

30. Work is progressing on the revised Local Plan and a draft is expected to be presented to Cabinet in November seeking approval for a first consultation.
31. A draft Design Supplementary Planning Document will also be presented to Cabinet seeking approval for the statutory consultation.

32. A call for sites for Local Green Spaces is now open for submissions from the community. This recognises green spaces which have a significant importance to local communities. These should only be designated where these green spaces are:
- (a) In reasonably close proximity to the community, it serves;
 - (b) Demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field) tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
 - (c) Local in character and not an extensive tract of land.
33. Sites which have been put forward which meet the criteria will be included in the review of the Local Plan.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

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

Operational Services

Blue Badges

2. We have experienced an improved position with Blue Badges currently having 60 people waiting for a Blue Badge Occupational Therapy assessment with the longest wait being 50 days at the time of writing this report.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

3. A recent external audit, to evaluate how well the council meets best practice standards in managing DFG, was completed. The audit found that some of our areas of our practice are delivered to a high standard and are 'exemplary'. Overall, the audit praised Darlington's approach in managing the grant alongside prioritisation of risk and impact to enable the grant to align to those most in need.
4. Bimonthly meetings continue to monitor governance arrangements for the application of DFG grants as well as monitoring those waiting for DFG referrals following Occupational Therapy recommendations.

Hospital Discharges

5. These have increased year on year alongside complexity, resulting in a higher use of intermediate care beds whilst achieving a reduction in short break stay beds and supporting the majority of discharges home with reablement.

Direct Payments (DP)

6. We have seen a small reduction in people using Direct Payments to meet eligible needs. We currently have 246 DP's which equates to 1.3% reduction. DP governance meetings are held quarterly to identify end reason and explore practice, system and process improvements. The practice guidance is currently under review and process maps are under development to aid Practitioners.

Safeguarding (SG)

7. The numbers of safeguarding concerns received during Quarter 1 have slightly reduced, however the number of Safeguarding's progressing to enquiry have increased. This

increase in progression to enquiry is likely due to raised awareness with care providers following the introduction of a new Decision Support tool (a mechanism for providers to check if the incident meets safeguarding concern thresholds) and Risk Notification process (this is a reporting tool for providers on low level incidents).

8. Self-neglect and acts of omission remain the highest proportion of safeguarding referrals both locally and regionally.
9. Two care homes are within our Executive Strategy procedures. Adult Social Care continue to work closely with our internal and system partners to support the providers make required improvements against the action plan. Lifted suspension is in place for one care home with phased admissions whilst monitoring improvements and actions.

Commissioning and Contracts

10. The Council, in partnership with the Integrated Care Board, is re-tendering its statutory Consolidated Advocacy provision in the Autumn with new commissioned arrangements expected to come into effect from 1 April 2026. There are a range of services included in the re-tendering exercise such as Care act (2014) advocacy, Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA) and Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA). Advocacy helps to ensure that people's voices, wishes and preferences are heard. Further, that their rights are upheld particularly when they have difficulty in speaking for themselves. An advocate plays a critical role in care management arrangements helping to protect human rights and playing an essential role in safeguarding.
11. Commissioning is working with Adult Services colleagues to review Darlington's Day Opportunities. These services provide a variety of different activities (e.g. life skills training, arts and craft etc) and support people with a range of diverse eligible needs such as autism, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health and older adults. Day opportunities can be provided in designated buildings or in community settings. The scope of the review includes commissioned arrangements as well as the Council's in-house provision. The objective of the review is to consider how the Council can continue to meet assessed eligible need for day opportunities using a strength-based approach that maximises the resources available, promotes independence and inclusion and delivers improved outcomes for people using the services.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

12. The Management Group is a newly established decision-making group made up of the Delegated Safeguarding Partners. It has oversight of child and adult strategic and operational activities, and they met on 23 June 2025. The focus of the agenda was roles and responsibilities of the partnership's subgroups in line with new safeguarding partnership arrangements. It was agreed, whilst the new arrangements are now in place, further discussion is required to consider what is needed in respect of governance and accountability to ensure the groups are clear on their roles and responsibilities. Chairs of the subgroups provided an overview of activity, summarising what they have achieved or is ongoing along with any issues or areas of concern.
13. The Lead Safeguarding Partners Strategic Group met on 7 July 2025 and agreed its Terms of Reference. Lead Partners are aware of the work ongoing through the Management Group

on the roles and responsibilities of subgroups. Partners were provided an overview of activity from the Management Group and Subgroups and the current position of the Integrated Care Board Reforms.

Councillor Anne-Marie Curry
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

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

Tackling Child Poverty

2. On 13th October 2025, we are welcoming the North East Child Poverty Commission to Darlington - it is holding its regular meeting here in the Borough focusing on child poverty here in the Tees Valley. So much progress is being made in the North East Combined Authority, and there is much more that can be done by partners here across the sub-region.
3. There will be presentations on partnerships across the Tees Valley, and a strategic discussion on Tees Valley wide action on child poverty: opportunities and barriers. I have met with Amanda Bailey, the Director of the North East Poverty Commission in advance, and will report back to Council regarding the action points from the session.

Early Intervention and Front Door

Children's Initial Advice Team

4. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) continues to operate as a stable and effective service, maintaining a strong focus on relational practice and ensuring that children and families receive the right support at the right time. The team remains committed to achieving the best possible outcomes through timely and proportionate decision-making.
5. Recent performance data, audit findings, and feedback indicate that CIAT is consistently facilitating appropriate service responses without delay. This reflects the team's ongoing efforts to ensure that decisions are proportionate, unnecessary social care assessments are avoided, and that safeguarding remains paramount. CIAT's approach ensures that children are protected and that the support provided is tailored to meet the individual needs of families.
6. To strengthen our offer around child exploitation, structural changes have been implemented with the Exploitation Team Manager, now located within the Care Planning structure to enhance strategic oversight and integration. Collaborative work has also taken place to review exploitation processes and procedures, ensuring they remain robust and responsive.

Building Stronger Families Service

7. Caseloads remain high within the service owing to high levels of demand, however it is encouraging that external Early Help Assessment's (EHA's) completed by partner agencies are increasing with an encouraging uptake of collaborative working. Work is ongoing to scrutinise the data to ensure that families receive the right service at the right time.
8. The Building Stronger Families management team continue to move the offer to one that is locality based, in line with the way social care teams deliver their service. Development of locality working for universal and targeted early help is in its early stages but is timely given the Families First for Children social care reform work that will increase at pace over 2025 and into 2026. Given the impact this will have across both internal and external partner agencies, it requires a collaborative approach, mapping out the localities and how the new process will work in practice, ensuring that families continue to receive a seamless and proportionate service.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service (YPEJS)

9. We have recently been inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) under the new regime. It focussed on the partnership arrangements when working with children and families. The focus was less on process and more engaging in a Child First approach. Under the new inspection arrangements, Victim Standards are now inspected in their own right, and members should be assured that our offer for victims has been highlighted as best practice by the Youth Justice Board. We are expecting the full report in a few weeks time.
10. On 31st July I attended our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership, which is now chaired by Children's Services' AD Chris Bell under the new arrangements. There were presentations on under 18 self harm admissions to County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust 2023-24, and Rape and Sexual Offences Delivery Group progress and overview of current context of sexual violence and future changes. These were important and thought-provoking pieces, and I am reflecting both with officers and colleagues on any issues that we as a local authority can take forwards.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

11. Since the strategic and operational responsibilities for exploitation have moved there has been a new procedure developed and agreed at the Senior Leadership Team meeting (SLT) which will be presented to the Strategic Child Exploitation Group in September. This provides a clear framework of intervention and support for children experiencing or at risk of experiencing exploitation. Ongoing development to introduce harm away from home conferences for children at risk of significant harm due to exploitation are taking place and will hopefully lead to the instigation of these meetings in the Autumn. In response to the Casey Report an audit jointly with Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council took place on 8 August 2025 to look at a cross-section of Police contacts where sexual abuse or harm is identified.
12. There remain challenges within the assessment and safeguarding service due to staff sickness which is impacting on workloads. To support with this a Child in Need pilot team commenced on 18 August 2025 which is a team of five Child and Family Assessment Workers (Family Workers) who case hold children in need. This is in line with the national changes which allows for non-social workers to case hold. This will be robustly monitored

by the senior leadership team as well as a dedicated Team Manager who will ensure weekly management oversight is recorded. This will both support capacity within the assessment and safeguarding teams as well as allowing us to pilot the new approach in readiness for national changes.

13. Training has taken place with the Children's Front Door to improve screening of requests for Children with Disabilities assessments following learning from complaints. This approach has seen a reduction in complaints over the last 12 months as highlighted in the annual compliments, complaints and comments report. A dedicated Children with Disabilities Social Worker is completing Social Care Advice in consultation with the SEND team to enable better quality advice to be offered where an EHCP is being considered.
14. In line with the changes within the exploitation service, a commissioning arrangement with Barnardo's is due to come to an end on 31 August 2025. In readiness for this we have developed our Keeping Families Together team to be able to offer both targeted and intensive support for children experiencing exploitation. To further support social workers a duty family support worker is providing daily support to the teams to enable them to focus on social work tasks.

Looked After and Care Leaver information

Children in our Care and Care Leavers

15. Data from 30 June 2025 evidenced we had 269 children in our care, with 25 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children. The reduction in children subject to a Care Order is a result of focused work across all services to ensure the threshold for the Care Order is consistently reviewed. In June 2025, nine children ceased to be looked after, one child became subject to an Special Guardianship Order (SGO), four turned 18 and receive leaving care support and two Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children (UASC) turned 18, who are both now receiving care leaver's support.
16. At the end of July 2025, we have 138 care leavers supported by the team aged 18-25. This is a reduction of two compared to last month. We also support 59 care experienced young people aged 16 and 17 years this is an increase of 2 meaning we continue to support 197 care experienced young people overall.
17. We keep in touch with our care leavers and there are regular opportunities for them to come together for activities and support. Recent activities have involved celebrating refugee week by having a celebratory meal, taking part in a national leaving care football tournament in Wolverhampton and a trip to the cricket. We have also met with MP Lola McEvoy for a Q&A session, and this will become a six-monthly event.
18. We have celebrated one of our Staying Close Personal Advisors securing a 90% reduction on water rates which when fully rolled out will benefit care leavers across the country. The Director of Resources Group have agreed to a reciprocal arrangement between the 12 North East Local Authorities to fund the payment of Council Tax for care leavers. Free bus travel across the Tees Valley is on track to be in place in the autumn.
19. The mentoring programme offers the opportunity for care experienced adults to become mentors for younger children in care and our care experienced young people.

20. We have successfully recruited and trained 11 care experienced young people. We currently have 100 young people attached to the programme with five young people waiting to be matched to a mentor, we have 24 planned endings from the project, an increase of 23 young people in March 2025.
21. We have successfully recruited and additional 10 peer mentors with pre-employment checks ongoing. This will allow the service to reach out to support more children in our care.
22. We are utilising the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) three nights per week Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 5.30-7.30 for children in care youth provisions. Our Monday session supports children aged 5-11 and we have 12 children attending each week. Our Tuesday/Thursday Secondary school aged children group receives a minimum of 15 young people attending each week.
23. On 7th August 2025 I visited YMCA's The Haven project and was blown away by the youth facilities and opportunities on offer. Together with my ward colleagues, I have been promoting The Haven and what it has to offer as a youth club and so much more via our Houghton Matters Facebook page, and I would encourage members to pay a visit themselves and get the word out!
24. Once per month we enjoy care leaver walks with groups of 10+ people attending each session.
25. Safe Space was a youth provision operated by the team for children in our care. It is a mix of social and focused activities aimed at reducing loneliness, anti-social behaviour and supporting children's emotional health. We received 12 months funding for this project, which ended October 2024. We have submitted a funding application to the Rotary Club to support with some of the costs to continue this valuable support to children in our care. We continue to wait for invite to attend a full Rotary meeting to present the project. We have been invited to attend a meeting with the Rotary Club in September to present Safe Space provision, we will hopefully be offered some funding support to restart an element of the project.
26. Staying Close continues to strengthen the support offered to young people preparing to leave care. We are pleased to share that the project has secured an additional year of funding from the Department for Education, recognising the vital role it plays in helping young people transition from care to independent living.
27. Currently, we are supporting 25 young people, a number that remains steady as individuals complete their support journey and achieve their personal goals. Since April 2023, the project has supported a total of 40 young people. Through close collaboration with the taster flat registered manager, semi-independent accommodation providers, and Housing Services, we have successfully transitioned 20 young people into more independent living arrangements.
28. Feedback from both young people and professionals continues to be overwhelmingly positive. One professional shared:

“Her passion and drive for her role shines through! I’ve worked with many young people’s personal advisors over the years, and she truly stands out—she’s a credit to your team!”

29. On 23rd July together with officers I attended a regional conference in Durham where care experienced young people drove the agenda and gave the presentations. It focused on young people’s experience of care, and at times was profoundly moving and thought-provoking, both for professionals and elected members. Together with members of our Corporate Parenting Panel, I am looking at how CPP meetings can better engage with our care experienced young people, and drive change. The conference gave both myself and officers food for thought on how that is relevant for Darlington.
30. On 20th August, I attended a Party in the Garden at Harewood Hill Lodge. It was brilliant meeting the young people who attend respite care there and their families, and hear how the Lodge is making a real and positive difference to their lives.
31. On 28th August, together with the Mayor and Cllr. Harker, I attended the Children in our Care celebration event. Members will be aware that we have been holding very successful celebration events for care leavers, and this replicated the awards ceremony for children and young people currently in our care. There were so many inspirational stories for children, their carers and professionals to celebrate, and it will certainly be replicated in future years.

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

32. As at the end of June 2025, we have 61 approved foster carer households who could provide fostering households for 84 children. 39 households are providing fostering households for 62 children. 28.7% of children are long term matched. We have 30 Kinship foster caring households providing homes to 39 children accounting for 28.5% of children in care therefore being placed within Kinship fostering households.
33. In the months of April, May and June we have had seven expressions of interest. Of these seven, two applicants withdrew from the process with three carers seeking to progress to assessment and two are at application stage.
34. In May, there we featured in One Darlington with numerous Darlington foster carers, describing why they love to foster for Darlington. Members of the Fostering Team have also completed regular wellness and wellbeing walks with foster carers. This promotes a sense of community when observed together, often sparking up conversations with members of the community regarding fostering as well as uniting our current foster carers, giving them opportunities to make friends and build networks. The Fostering Team welcomed a support worker into the team, they will lead the team in regard to recruitment and retention over the upcoming summer months.
35. The addition of a second panel monthly has supported with capacity to ensure that carers are not being unnecessarily delayed and waiting for approval. The team has successfully ensured that all foster carer reviews are held and presented to panel within timescale.

Homes for our Children

36. The CEDARS manager has submitted their Ofsted paperwork. We continue to await Ofsted to contact us and progress the registration.
37. Gilling children's home repurposing is progressing with the home to be called Blossom. We are identifying young people who would benefit from moving into the home. We are awaiting fire risk assessment report and replacement of one bedroom window, this work is managed through ongoing project plan, we are aiming for Ofsted registration paperwork to be submitted in August 2025. Job adverts for staff are live with a projected recruitment timescale of approximate three months from interview.
38. The proposed move of homes from Dunrobin to the new home in Sherbourne Close was expected to be ready in September 2025. This has been pushed back to November 2025 a plan is being worked on to register the home with Ofsted and then move staff and children.
39. All three mainstream children's homes are running at full capacity with three children in each home.

Education

40. Darlington College, in collaboration with Darlington Borough Council, national charity DFN Project SEARCH offers a supported internship program for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) with major local employer Amazon. The first year of the programme has been completed with four young people obtaining full-time employment at the end of their internship. The partnership is intending to increase the number of internships available to Darlington young people in the second year of the programme.

Youth Unemployment

41. The Darlington 18-24 claimant count has risen slightly from 7.0% (525 young people) in March 2025 to 7.1% (530 young people) in June 2025, a rise of 0.1%.
42. Darlington at 7.1% is still higher than North-East average (5.9%) and National average (5.5%). In the same period both the North-East average and the England average fell by 0.1%.
43. June 2025 figures for the Tees Valley show the claimant count for Hartlepool, Stockton and Redcar all fell, whilst Darlington and Middlesbrough increased slightly (March 2025 figures in brackets):
 - (a) 8.3% (8.9%) Hartlepool
 - (b) 8.3% (8.2%) Middlesbrough
 - (c) 8.2% (8.5%) Stockton
 - (d) 7.1% (7.0%) Darlington
 - (e) 7.0% (7.6%) Redcar & Cleveland

Darlington Employment Initiative (DEI)

44. The DEI programme is funded through UKSPF and the target group is economically inactive people of working age. The priority groups are over 50 early retirees, those looking after the family or home and those who are short-term sick (less than 12 months).
45. The two staff started the programme mid-February 2024. The current programme was due to run until 31 March 2026. The target original was for 104 starts with 24 participants in employment by programme end, we are just waiting on revised targets.
46. By the end of June 2025, the team had engaged 194 participants (against an overall contract target of 238 to the end of March 2026) with 103 moved into employment (against an overall contract target of 55). Of those above 88 of the 194 participants were aged 16-24 (45%) with 46 of those moving into work (52%).

Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

47. The government set aside £45m to establish eight Youth Guarantee Trailblazer areas to test new ways of supporting young people (18-21 year olds) into employment or training, by bringing together and enhancing existing programmes in partnership with local areas. The Trailblazer was due to start on 1 April 2025 for a year. Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) was able to submit a bid for up to £5m with the target group being those 18-21 year olds on benefits.
48. SBC as lead authority has issued a letter of intent on 15 July to award a grant of up to £196,165 to Darlington Borough Council, to deliver activity under the TVCA's Youth Guarantee Trailblazer Programme, supporting inclusive growth and the progression of young people into education, employment, or training during the period 1 July 2025 - 31 March 2026. However, Darlington will now need to recruit staff on a fixed-term contract to deliver.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

49. The review of the required resourcing arrangements for Children's placements (Children's Social Care and SEND) has concluded. Officers are currently mobilising substantive arrangements. The priorities of the review included:
 - (a) Reflection upon the strengths and limitations of the interim placement configuration;
 - (b) Identification of opportunities to improve service stability and resilience;
 - (c) Sustainment of the significant levels of cost avoidance achieved;
 - (d) Maintaining the positively impactful provider relations developed;
 - (e) Effectively responding to the increasing complexity of placement requirements;
 - (f) Ensuring statutory timeframes are adhered to.
50. The reconfigured placement arrangements are expected to take effect from autumn following the conclusion of the recruitment to substantive Placement Assistant posts.
51. Children's commissioners continue to proactively engage with subregional and regional workstreams. Through regional opportunities Darlington has successfully secured a number of small targeted non-recurrent grants to take forward key strategic priorities. The most recent award will enhance the mobilisation and embedding of the Inclusion Charter in educational setting in Darlington (cross-phase from Early Years to post 16).

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

52. The Management Group is a newly established decision-making group made up of the Delegated Safeguarding Partners. It has oversight of child and adult strategic and operational activities and they met on 23 June 2025. The focus of the agenda was roles and responsibilities of the partnership's sub-groups in line with new safeguarding partnership arrangements. It was agreed, whilst the new arrangements are now in place, further discussion is required to consider what is needed in respect of governance and accountability to ensure the groups are clear on their roles and responsibilities. Chairs of the sub-groups provided an overview of activity, summarising what they have achieved or is ongoing along with any issues or areas of concern.
53. The Lead Safeguarding Partners Strategic Group met on 7 July 2025 and agreed its Terms of Reference. Partners are aware of the work ongoing through the Management Group on the roles and responsibilities of sub-groups. Partners were provided an overview of activity from the Management Group and sub-groups and the current position of the Integrated Care Board Reforms.
54. The Partnership will be focusing on the Children First reforms and the statutory responsibilities on the Partnership over the coming months, having heard an overview of the current status in Darlington. The Bill has not yet completed its circuit through Parliament. The Early Help Strategic Board has oversight, and the next stage is partnership engagement and local design of services and how that will work in Darlington.

HAF - Holiday Activities and Food Programme

55. The HAF programme (Holiday Activities and Food) is for children aged 5 – 16 who are eligible for benefits related free school meals. The programme has been running over the summer holidays at venues across the town. Over 100 events were made available, and activities including trips to Beamish, surfing, NE Wake Park and Kirkletham Owl centre as well as enrichment activities in the town including 4motion, top up swimming, learn to ride sessions, bowling and Sim King Gaming.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Children and Young People Portfolio

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

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

Public Health

2. As previously shared Local authorities across the North East have been working together to implement a regional community pharmacy Patient Group Directive (PGD) for the supply of prescription only stop smoking medications. The first phase of this is now live, with seven Darlington pharmacies signed up to provide Varenicline (previously called Champix). There has been a delay to the commencement of the provision of the newer medication Cytisine via pharmacies, but it is anticipated this will be in place shortly. This new provision further enhances the offer available locally, and work continues to encourage more pharmacies to join the scheme.
3. The Lung Cancer Screening Programme is now being offered to residents of Darlington from Mowden Park Rugby Club. The programme aims to detect lung cancer early, often even before people have symptoms. Experience from other areas shows that three quarters of people who have been diagnosed with lung cancer through the programme in have been caught at an early stage (stages I or II), when lung cancer is easier to treat and more likely to be successful. Without early invention, currently less than a third of lung cancers are caught at an early stage. Patients registered at practices who are aged between 55-74 years and have a history of smoking on their medical record are being offered a lung health check.
4. The first meeting of Smokefree Darlington Tobacco Alliance was held in September, this is an important next step in developing a Darlington wide approach to reducing rates of smoking and the harm caused by tobacco. Staff from Fresh, the regional tobacco control office, attended and provided an overview of the system wide approach to tobacco control.
5. The first Suicide Prevention Operational Partnership meeting has been held at the Dolphin Centre, with around 30 representatives from a range of statutory partners and VCSE organisations in attendance. The group was introduced to the national priorities for suicide prevention and the current local picture by partners from Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust and North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, as well as a service update from the If U Care Share Foundation, which provides support and resources for individuals and families affected by suicide. There was constructive discussion about what already works well in Darlington and how partners can work together to identify and address local priorities. The information will be collated for future meetings and will contribute to the development of the suicide prevention action plan.

Health and Well Being Board

6. The Health and Wellbeing Board has met in June and September, with main items of discussion including the Police and Crime Justice Plan 2025-2029; Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2024-25; a deep dive on the pregnancy and early years priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, alongside an annual review of all priorities; Better Care Fund and the new Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, which is a statutory responsibility of the Board.
7. The thematic deep dive on pregnancy and early years was the first of two deep dives scheduled for this year, exploring the areas of smoking in pregnancy, breastfeeding, hospital admissions for childhood injuries and school readiness. Board members were presented with key data, including at a ward level where available, to highlight areas of progress, risk and the inequalities which exist across Darlington. There was also a detailed discussion on smoking in pregnancy which resulted in a number of recommendations being agreed.
8. The annual review of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities provided a high level overview of progress to date and a summary of key outcomes, describing current performance and trends.

Housing Services

Skerne Park Community Event

9. Our Housing Services team held a community event at Skerne Park on Friday 8 July 2025 at the Coleridge Centre. This event was organised with North Star Housing, along with assistance from the Darlington Partnership.
10. The event was well attended by local residents and focused on promoting safety in the local area, including gas and electric safety. Various sporting activities were arranged, from axe throwing to ballon making and face painting for the children, and stalls were manned to provide help and advice from all agencies in attendance. An estate inspection was also completed on the day, with a litter pick concluding the event.

Housing Options – Domestic Abuse

11. Following a successful trial using Government funding, I am pleased to report that we have now made the position of Housing Options Officer (Domestic Abuse) permanent, as part of our Housing Options team, helping to support victims of domestic abuse who are experiencing homelessness. The post has grown and supports not only Housing Options and the wider Housing Services Team, but also has also supported and informed commissioning, Public Health, the Police and our third sector providers, including Harbour and Family Help. In 2024-25, the officer supported 156 victims of domestic abuse, including 25 people placed in temporary accommodation.

Ending Rough Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool (ERSAT)

12. Our Housing Options Team has been taking part in the ERSAT pilot project set up by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, to help inform the routes to

rough sleeping and how it can be prevented. It is aimed toward single homeless who are non-priority need, not currently rough sleeping and not likely to meet the criteria for statutory support within the legislation. The team are completing this, in addition to the homeless assessment and gateway for support. It involves completing a series of questions, which will identify those that could be at high risk of rough sleeping and where a person scores over a certain amount, we offer accommodation and placement and encourage that person to come into services, therefore preventing and diverting them from the streets. Between January and July 2025, 223 assessments were completed with 73 people offered accommodation to prevent rough sleeping.

Lifeline Services

13. Our Lifeline Services are all about inclusion, ensuring that residents with visual impairments, for example, can take part in events in our sheltered and extra care schemes. One of our tenants at Rockwell House, who was previously a primary school teacher, used her creative imagination and produced an idea of enlarging bingo books. Tenants have trailed the new books and found that they have enabled those with visual impairments, who previously didn't take part, to now join the activities. This will now be rolled out to all our schemes, ensuring those with visual impairments are not excluded from activities – a simple but effective idea.

Tenancy Enforcement – Body Worn Videos

14. Our Housing Services Tenancy Enforcement team will now be wearing Body Worn Videos (BWV) to promote overall safety for officers, our tenants and to assist with collecting evidence for legal action taken against perpetrators of anti-social behaviour in our Council housing.
15. The use of BWVs will also help to act as a deterrent and protect the Tenancy Enforcement Officers, due the serious nature of some of the anti-social behaviour we are now dealing with. To implement the BWV, the Tenancy Enforcement Officers and Housing Team Leaders recently completed their Security Industry Authority training and were successful in passing their exam to obtain their licences.

Universal Credit

16. One of the key priorities for our Housing Services team in 2025-26 is to support those remaining tenants migrating from legacy welfare benefits (such as Housing Benefit) onto Universal Credit (UC). It is estimated that there are now less than 280 working age Council tenants who will move to UC by March 2026. Most of those left to migrate are on long term disability benefits.
17. The move to UC will be a huge change for those tenants, as they will go from receiving their benefits from weekly/fortnightly to monthly, with an initial 5 week wait for their first payment. Therefore, it is crucial that we contact these tenants as soon as possible to ensure they are receiving the correct rate of UC, provide budgeting advice and make affordable repayment plans for those who do get in arrears. Tenants who need more in-depth financial support will be referred to our Tenancy Sustainment team, who are specifically trained to give advice about welfare benefits and maximising income.

18. Currently, of those rent accounts in arrears, the average is £343, compared to the national average of £517. More specifically, accounts where UC is the primary source of income, the average level of arrears is £438, compared to national average of £581.

Dolphin Centre

19. Swimming has been extremely well attended over the summer with families and adult swimmers. A new pool party introduced on Tuesdays throughout the holidays has proven very popular with customers queuing along the front of the building to access this fun session hosted by a live DJ on poolside. The diving pool, slides and interactive toddler pool has encouraged footfall to the town from all over the northeast.
20. Soft play and bowling provided ongoing entertainment for families during this period with new offers encouraging footfall in bowling during off peak times such as Sunday evening where unlimited bowling encouraged many visits at a time that is generally quiet. Soft Play hosted themed events throughout the summer in addition to casual play which was welcomed by families with young children.
21. The team attended local colleges fresher's week to promote the strong offer at the Dolphin Centre for students in the town including the popular student's membership and discount card available on activities during the day. In addition to this Darlington college have extended the agreement with the centre whereby they fund students to attend the gym and swimming as part of their curricular activity.
22. The final phase of work continues to complete the installation of 399 photovoltaic (PV) panels on the flat roofs of the Dolphin Centre and is expected to complete autumn.

Inclusion Programme

23. Darlington Move More Teams Boccia session at the Dolphin Centre continues to be well attended on a weekly basis. We are currently working with Boccia England to set up a club and the opportunity to run a Boccia coaching course. This will allow the coaches and staff members who attend with service users to gain the Boccia coaching qualification.

Sport England Place Partnership

24. As previously shared, the council has been working closely with Tees Valley Sport to develop a local proposal for Darlington to be one of Sport England's new place partners. The purpose of the programme is to help communities become more active and tackle the inequalities that persist in physical activity, through collaborative working with residents and across sectors. The initial phase of work was focused on applying for the development award, which has been successful, with Darlington receiving funding of £221,228.
25. The development work will be delivered over the next 12 to 18 months, led by Tees Valley Sport, working alongside public health and leisure at the council, Darlington Association on Disability and YMCA Tees Valley. The funding will be utilised to develop community insights, build local capacity and further develop our local priorities and delivery proposals, which together will support a final application to be part of the Sport England Place Expansion. If this is successful, additional funding would be made available for Darlington, to reduce level of physical inactivity.

26. The work on the development phase has already commenced, with a two day Local Leadership Programme held on 16 and 17 September. The programme covered:

- Systems thinking and how it supports real change to change happen;
- Darlington's local health landscape and priorities and how physical activity can support the challenges;
- Leadership skills for collaborating across sectors;
- Reaching communities and designing systems that work for all;
- Creating a shared purpose for change.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing

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COUNCIL
02 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

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

Highway Maintenance Programme

2. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
 - (a) Unc. Barnes Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.268km)
 - (b) Surface Dressing Contract: two sites (2.330km)
3. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) Micro-Asphalt Contract: four sites (1.298km)
 - (b) B6290 Carmel Road North (Phase 3): Carriageway Resurfacing (0.620km)
 - (c) A1150 Stockton Road / Whinfield Road Roundabout: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.240km)
 - (d) A68 West Auckland Road (Phase 2): Carriageway Resurfacing (0.475km)
 - (e) Unc. Mary Court: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.038km)
 - (f) Unc. Willow Road North/ West Auckland Road East Back Lane: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.108km)
 - (g) Unc. Green Tree Yard: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.038km)
 - (h) Unc Daryngton Close: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.074km)
4. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Unc Welbeck Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.225km)
 - (b) C180 Parkside: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.435km)
 - (c) C88 Whessoe Road: Carriageway Resurfacing 0.928km)
 - (d) C38 Neasham Road, Neasham: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.877km)

Bus Services

5. From the beginning of May, the 6 and 6A have seen an enhanced service with a daily evening service and an hourly daytime Sunday service introduced using funding from developments (Section 106). These enhancements will operate for a minimum three-year period. Tees Flex is continuing until March 2026, with a decision beyond this period to be made by TVCA.

Safer Routes to School

6. **Table 1** below shows progress on all our Safe Routes to School (SRTS) schemes that are currently being developed. The construction dates are anticipated and will be dependent upon the outcome of consultation and the availability of construction resource at that time.

| Scheme | Scheme Consultation | Ward Member Briefing | Portfolio Holder sign off | Traffic Regulation Order Consultation | Potential Cabinet (if we receive objections) | Construction (currently programmed) |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Hurworth Academy School 20mph Zone | Complete | Complete | Complete | Complete | Complete | Now complete |
| Abbey Infants and Junior School 20mph scheme | Complete | Complete | Complete | TROs advertised January 2025 | April 2025 | Cleveland Terrace and Abbey Road - some early enabling works undertaken during Easter 2025 holidays with remaining work to be carried out during the summer holiday period. Any snagging work will be picked up in the Autumn half term break. |
| Stanhope Road North Puffin crossing | Public consultation September 2025 | Complete | Awaiting outcome of consultation | November 2025 | February 2026 | A scheme has been drawn up and consultation with local residents and businesses to commence in September. |
| St. Augustine's School 20mph scheme | Complete | Complete | Engagement report being collated | September 2025 | December 2025 | School Summer holidays 2026 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|--|---|----------------------|---|
| St Bede's School 20mph scheme | Complete | Complete | Complete | TROs advertised January | April 2025 | Currently programmed for Easter 2026 will coincide with maintenance scheme. |
| Longfield School Puffin crossing | March 2025 | Complete | Awaiting outcome of consultation | No statutory consultation needed – resident and stakeholder consultation only | N/A No TROs required | Looking to coordinate construction with highway maintenance scheme on Longfield Road. Date to be agreed |
| Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme | Resident consultation to be determined, engagement with the school to be undertaken | Ward member briefing late January | Awaiting outcome of consultation and decision on funding | TBD | TBD | TBD |

Resident Parking Zone (RPZ) Review

- Scrutiny Committee are investigating differential charging rates for permits depending on impacts from various vehicles. The scope has been considered, and the initial findings were presented to the committee in early April. Following previous reports and work by the Communities & Local Services Scrutiny Committee, a questionnaire for residents has been prepared and the consultation will run until 13 October. As well as the online consultation, paper copies of the questionnaire will be available from customer services in the Town Hall and the Cockerton and Crown Street libraries should people wish to complete the questionnaire and return it to us. A telephone number and email address have also been set up so that residents can contact us with specific queries or to request copies of the questionnaire in different formats if needed. It is hoped that this will help to inform a revision of our RPZ policy.

Hopetown Darlington

- Hopetown Darlington had a busy summer period with lots of activities for families throughout the holidays including science workshops, animal encounters and craft activities. There were also fun activities on Foundry Green, including a bespoke 'Guess Who' game featuring the characters of Hopetown. Hopetown also hosted *The Kiosk - A Moving Workshop for a Moving Story*. Inspired by the E.D. Walker & Wilson newsagent's kiosk in the museum, local artist Adam Shaw reimagined *the kiosk* as a space to delve into the area's rich local history through conversation, creative activities and visual storytelling.
- Heritage Open Days activities took place at Hopetown on 13 and 14 September. Throughout the weekend, visitors were able to attend a Curator talk and tour led by our Collections Engagement Manager and participate in hands-on workshops, learning directly from skilled artisans including metalwork, willow weaving, clay modelling,

basketry and textile weaving.

10. We welcomed *Titans of Steam: Legends of the railway* to the site from 20 September. The world-famous locomotive Flying Scotsman joined other legends, including Tornado and Sir Nigel Gresley, celebrating Britain's engineering might. Some of the engines were in light steam and visitors were able to get up close to the locomotives as part of the footplate tour experience. *Titans of Steam* closes on 5 October.
11. *Ghost Train* and a *Night at the Museum* event took place at Hopetown on 20 September. Visitors were able to experience the site at night and greet the Ghost Train, a large-scale performance art installation, which made its way up from Darlington town centre on the evening.

Ghost Train featured performers, live music and a procession of large-scale art installations representing some of the world's most important inventions including Locomotion no 1. 8 coal wagons, created from converted cars, contained performers and artists in a carnival style providing an epic show for Darlington residents.

Hopetown Darlington was at the centre of the bicentenary celebrations on 27 September as we celebrated the culmination of the S&DR200 festival. Thousands of visitors booked visits before and after the Anniversary Journey Celebration at Skerne Bridge, with the replica Locomotion No.1 celebrate the birthplace of passenger railways to re-enact the famous journey from 200 years ago.

On Track for Storytime

12. 1,300 children were gifted a copy of *Little Loco's Big Day*, by Caroline Hardie, and a film was created of pupils reading and performing the book.
13. Evaluation of the project found that at the time of writing the report, the filmed performance of the story had reached 681 views on YouTube and over 7,500 on Facebook. A survey was conducted for children, parents and teachers which discovered that 44% of children reported that the project made them more excited about reading, 55% were more interested in trains and locomotives, and 33% expressed a desire to visit Hopetown and join the festival activities as a direct result of the project.
14. Parents and carers also reported strong engagement, with 71% of responders saying the book gifting encouraged them to read more with their child and 43% were inspired to read more themselves. All parent and carer respondents (100%) were more excited to visit the railway museum and participate in festival events as a direct result of the project.
15. Teachers observed clear benefits: 75% noted improvements in reading comprehension, as well as enhanced town pride and belonging. Others reported increased enthusiasm for reading, greater confidence in speaking and self-expression, and stronger performance skills.

Libraries Takeover Day

16. Children and families visited the market square to enjoy Library Takeover Day with storytelling, performances, illustration workshops and book giftings. The author tent

attracted a range of audiences as visitors could buy a signed copy of a book from a selection of the towns great published writers.

Summer Activity Programme

17. Over the Summer the libraries' annual feat to keep children reading over the long summer holidays took place. Children aged 0 -16 were able to enter our Summer Reading Challenge for free to win a host of exciting prizes including Jelly Cat branded soft toys, LEGO sets, Panto Tickets and a Nintendo Switch II. To encourage good role modelling, parents and carers could join in the fun to be in with a chance of winning a £100 Amazon voucher.

Over 100 activities, events and workshops have been provided by Libraries over the summer holidays including T-shirt and mug design, virtual reality experiences into Space and prehistoric times, animal encounters, Princess Parties and magic shows.

Darlington Library's digital innovation area, The Hive, offered a huge range of design and technology workshops during the Summer, with children utilising our Seed Library and creating "pet planters" using the laser cutter for their crops to grow in, and designing their own tote bags to replace plastic bags.

SEND Bags

18. In response to Health Services noting a large increase in demand for support with potentially neurodivergent young children, we have launched SEND Grab Bags. The newest addition to our range of Grab Bags target preschool children within families who believe their baby or toddler to be neurodivergent, and who may benefit from increased speaking and listening, sensory tactile experiences, and parental bonding. The bags contain five specially chosen books which either discuss feelings and emotions, are tactile to touch, or are recommend by professional for neurodivergent children.

Linking with Health Services and the autism and neurodivergent charity Daisy Chain, we have included helpful information and links to support.

We hope these bags may in some cases decrease the likelihood and severity of concerns, and work as a tool to support families and the services around them.

Hippodrome

19. The Hippodrome Membership scheme had a successful period with memberships almost doubling with the announcement of priority booking for *SIX the Musical* for members. The Membership Scheme creates an opportunity for audience development encouraging multiple visits to the Hippodrome across the year with benefits including 10% discount on selected shows, priority booking and special events and tours.
20. Major shows in the programme across the period include dramas *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Haunting of Blaine Manor* and *Little Women*, *Showstopper the Improvised Musical*, family show *In the Night Garden*, comedians Milton Jones and Stewart Lee, and musical tributes *Rumours of Fleetwood Mac* and *The James Bond Spectacular*

concert.

21. The Hippodrome worked in partnership with Curious Arts and Theatre Hullabaloo to deliver a Curious Takeover (family Pride event) in August. The event was a fun-packed, free creative day of activities for all the family. Including colourful arts and crafts, story times, workshops, lip-sync battles, face painting, and a dress-up station. The event was attended by over 500 people with wonderful feedback across the day.

Creative Darlington

22. There were 2,327 visits to Darlington Library Art Gallery during the *Whistle Stop* exhibition which ran from 14 June 2025 to 23 July 2025 offering insight into the Stockton & Darlington railway and the impact of railways across the wider world. A selection of railway related works held in Darlington Borough Council's Borough Art Collection and Local Studies Collection were displayed alongside this. Of 19 respondents to the statement 'I enjoyed my visit to Darlington Library Art Gallery' by questionnaire during this exhibition 17 selected Strongly Agree and two selected Tend to agree. We will support a second sharing of this exhibition, which is touring across County Durham and Tees Valley, at Darlington Friends Community Hub in late August.
23. The *British Railways, Alan Kitching in Darlington* exhibition was on display in Darlington Library Art Gallery Saturday 26 July 2025 to Thursday 4 September 2025. Born in Darlington in 1940, Alan is amongst the UK's leading letterpress artists and begun his career as a teenage apprentice at a print shop on Post House Wynd. Now a Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Art and Visiting Professor at University of the Arts London 46 people attended the exhibition private view on 31 July, including those travelling from Scotland and London to attend. The third in a trio of railway themed exhibitions at Darlington Library Art Gallery, *On Track*, by Darlington Stitch and Create opened on Saturday 6 September 2025 and will remain on display until Thursday 16 October 2025.
24. Darlington Borough Council Heritage & Culture fund budget supported the commission of a new mural by The Arthur Wharton Foundation from Illumination Wall Art focused on Darlington's contributions to railway and sporting heritage, entitled *We changed the world from here*, which was unveiled on Wednesday 10 September 2025.
25. Darlington Borough Council Heritage & Culture fund budget has supported participatory activities and projects led by local creatives, which have also secured S&DR Community Grant support and/or support through the Community Rail Officer. These include:
 - (a) *Write on Track*, led by Ann Cuthbert and Pam Plumb which concluded with an awards ceremony at Hopetown Darlington on 13 July 2025, following a writing competition open to adults and children (82 entrants from Darlington borough) and eight writing workshops involving 60 participants.
 - (b) The *Bi-Centennial Pen Pals & Love Letters* project led by writer Bob Beagrie delivered participatory sessions for writers and events to showcase some of the results were at Hopetown Darlington on Saturday 20 September 2025 and Darlington Library on Wednesday 24 September 2025.

- (c) A temporary public artwork, *Kiosk* by Adam Shaw was on display between July and August 2025, offering visitors to Hopetown Darlington opportunities to explore printmaking with a variety of drop-in sessions. *Kiosk* activities have also been shared with pupils at Rydal School and students at Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

26. The summer stage and events programme attracted thousands of visitors to Darlington through the summer holidays including *Darlington by the Sea*, Darlington Pride Weekender, and over 2,500 entrants joined the 10k at the beginning of August town centre accommodation was fully booked. Specialist event *Making Sense Together*, which is programmed for neurodivergent families, saw many organisations and charities connecting with families whilst offering sensory and tailored activities for its audience. Showcasing the independent retailers on our high street saw the return of the *Mega Misfits Market* organised by Rage and Love across a weekend attracting thousands of visitors to Darlington. The *Rhythm and Tunes* weekend attracted visitors nationally and this event fills hotels across Darlington.
27. The Events Team has worked closely with the S&DR200 Festival team to plan and deliver two major events—*Ghost Train* and *Anniversary Journey* in September. These large-scale celebrations attracted visitors from across the UK and internationally.
28. The town centre has recently welcomed several new businesses, further enhancing Darlington's independent offering. Additional units have also been let, with more new openings expected in the coming months. Among the latest additions are *Unlocking Treasures* on Skinnergate and *Kate's Accessories* on Queen Street. Meanwhile, *Andy's Candy* and *Renne* are celebrating five successful years of trading in the town.
29. 11 September saw the northern launch of the High Street Positives campaign welcoming agents, experts and retailers to Darlington, for a presentation and networking event to highlight the high street and positive news to help increase people's perceptions of town centre, share best practise, ideas and find out how the high streets are evolving.

Environmental Services

30. Members will be aware of concerns about the condition of the brick train and surrounding area that had been previously received by the council. Although the land in question is not in the council's ownership, Officers have led in meetings with the private sector to revitalise *Train* and the immediate area. This work is due to be completed by the end of September.
31. On 31 March 2026, the statutory requirement to collect food waste separately comes into force. Officers are currently in the process of overseeing the transformation in collections to accommodate this practice. From the aforementioned date, food waste collections will be introduced to all residential properties, along with recycling collections increasing from fortnightly to weekly. This latter element seeks to improve the borough's recycling rate and behaviour change. A campaign is being developed to push increased recycling.

32. The Council was asked to represent the Northumbrian region in the national 'Britain in Bloom' awards. Judging for this took place in August, and we await the outcome which will be announced at the end of October.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

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

Revenues and Benefits

2. The national benchmarking data for the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates in 2024-25 has recently been published and I am pleased to report that again, Darlington Borough Council is one of the top performers in the region:
 - (a) For the in-year collection of Council Tax, our performance of 96.32% was third best in the North-East and above the regional average of 94.94% and the national average of 95.88%.
 - (b) For the in-year collection of Business Rates, our performance of 99.18% was the best in the North-East and above the regional average of 97.80% and the national average of 97.32%.
 - (c) For the collection of Council Tax arrears, our performance of 28.37% was the second best in the North-East and well above the regional average of 15.09% and the national average of 17.35%. In addition, we have the lowest amount of Council Tax arrears outstanding in the region at £7.25m, compared to a regional average of £28.95m.
3. Our Revenues and Benefits team continues to perform well in recovering long-standing and large debts to the Council, as follows:
 - (a) One debtor, who was a local landlord, owed over £4,800 in unpaid Council Tax for various properties in Darlington. Charging orders were secured on the properties and as a result, the property owner paid the amount in full.
 - (b) Committal action was taken against a debtor who owed over £7,600 in arrears and had wilfully refused to pay Council Tax. A warrant for his arrest was issued by the Court and following contact with the debtor, he was persuaded to apply for Council Tax Support, reducing the debt to £3,900 with the remainder being collected from his Universal Credit payments.
 - (c) A Housing Benefit overpayment of over £4,000 was created in 2016 following a DWP fraud investigation. Various attempts were made to recover the debt and in 2022 we finally obtained the debtors employment details. Deductions were made from his earnings, and the debt is now fully repaid. This case illustrates how our Revenues and Benefits team make every effort to ensure those people who commit benefit fraud repay the amounts fraudulently obtained.

Climate Change

4. ICT are in the process of replacing all of the network hardware (switches and Wireless Access Points) across Darlington Borough Council and Stockton Borough Council over the next 12 months. This new technology will reduce costs for both Councils but also offers carbon reduction benefits through better power management and more efficient power consumption.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

5. The pilot of the MINUTE AI tool has now finished, and the Government team leading its development is considering the future scope of the product. Within the council we are continuing to assess other AI tools. The AI Strategy and Ethics group has been established with its main purpose being to assess AI technologies from different perspectives before such tools are adopted by the council. Recognising that AI products can be created to try and replicate human thinking, we need to give more consideration to how the AI software works, than we would with other non-AI software products. To achieve this understanding, not only does the group include people with specialist AI and data knowledge, but it also includes people with specialist knowledge of equality and diversity, human resources, communications, climate change, and finance.

DBS Applications for Members

6. Further to the decision of Council on 24 November 2024, and subject to subsequent guidance received from the Disclosure and Barring (DBS) Service in relation to Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Checks, the process of undertaking DBS Checks for Members started in July 2025.
7. At the time of writing this report, thirty-one DBS applications have successfully been completed with no disclosures being made, with a further five DBS applications currently with the Disclosure and Barring Service for authorisation and processing.
8. A further nine DBS applications have been submitted, and applications will be progressed when the provision of appropriate identification documentation is received.
9. Five Members are yet to make a DBS application. Officers from the Democratic Services Team continue to monitor the applications and will pursue those Members yet to apply.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

10. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects being developed and delivered.
 - (a) In terms of some of the larger projects being delivered in the programme:
 - i. Neasham Road Housing scheme is progressing despite being impacted by a significant act of vandalism.
 - ii. Sherbourne Close housing scheme is also progressing.
 - iii. The demolition and clearance phase of the Skinnergate Housing scheme is on site and progressing.

- iv. The former Northern Echo building regeneration project is also progressing moving into the internal works phases.
 - v. The refurbishment works to provide office space at No.156 Northgate are progressing.
 - vi. The tender for refurbishment works to No.142 Northgate has been received and is being assessed.
 - vii. TVCA continue to manage the Darlington Station project; with works continuing on the internal fit out works, and completion of the rail infrastructure and new pedestrian link bridge. The works to both entrances are scheduled to start over the coming months.
- (b) Following a procurement exercise a development partner (CityHeart) has been identified to bring forward proposals for a number of key sites within the town centre.
- (c) Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
- (d) There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.

Councillor Mandy Porter
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main updates under the Stronger Communities Portfolio are as follows: -

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends for all Darlington

| Darlington | YTD July 2024 | YTD July 2025 |
|------------|---------------|---------------|
| Crime | 3706 | 3596 |
| ASB | 935 | 1225 |

Crime

2. The year-to-date figure (to July 2025) is lower than the same period last year, by 3%. Aspects of crime showing increasing trends are arson, robbery, sexual offences and racially motivated offences whereas there have been significant reductions in the incidence of theft, burglary and vehicle offences. These reduced by varying amounts (19.5%, 17.4% and 32.1% reduction respectively) and shoplifting also reduced by 17.2%.

ASB

3. ASB year-to-date figure (to July 2025) is higher than the same period last year by 31%. During the reporting period there was an increase in anti-social behaviour over the period associated with youths, off-road bikes and ASB nuisance and damage in parks and play areas. Additional patrols are being undertaken and new signage is being erected for hotspot areas.
4. Areas of increased ASB reports are Sadberge and Whessoe, Cockerton East, Middleton St George, Lascelles, College, Mowden, Hurworth, and Haughton.
5. The town centre ASB has decreased by 3% year to date.
6. The Civic Enforcement Team continue to work with the Police and the Young People’s Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention. Over the school holidays there has been an increase in ASB, particularly within play parks across Darlington. Both Civic Enforcement and Police have increased patrols across these highlighted areas. Civic Enforcement consider where appropriate deployable CCTV cameras at locations of high ASB. Following the schools re-opening, the Civic Enforcement Team are engaging with the schools to identify eight young people across Darlington who have been responsible for ASB over the holidays where partners have been unable to identify them. Once these offenders

have been identified appropriate action will be taken.

7. We are working on taking cases to court where a young male has breached his civil injunction and Civic Enforcement have also obtained an interim injunction on another young male who has been causing ASB in the town centre.
8. During the reporting period the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service have received six referrals into the Early Intervention and Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team.
9. Between 1 June 2025 and 14 August 2025.
 - (a) Six young people received first warnings for ASB
 - (b) Eight young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
 - (c) Five young people committed ABA breaches
 - (d) Six young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young People's Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention
 - (e) Seven young people are awaiting interview
 - (f) One young person has received a Civil Injunction, a further file for one young person is sat with Legal, pending a court date.
 - (g) The ASB prevention officer attended four Primary Schools to discuss with students in Years 3-6, the issues surrounding Anti-Social behaviour.

Environmental Crime

10. Since the last reporting period officers have continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes. The figures below provide an overview of activity from 1 June 2025 – 14 August 2025:
 - (a) 91 environmental crime cases have been investigated. 66 of these cases are closed and the remaining are still under investigation.
 - (b) Five Fixed Penalty Notices have been served. Two for Fly Tipping each £1,000 and two x £100 for drinking in a public place (PSPO) and one x £100 fine for Begging inside the PSPO area.
 - (c) Four Warnings were issued under the new PSPO Procedure in relation to side waste.
 - (d) One Case in relation to side waste was withdrawn as the Defendant moved away with no forwarding address
 - (e) Two individuals were prosecuted for obstructing investigations into the containment of waste and fly tipping - both were ordered to pay £1,074.

Trail cameras to improve CCTV deployment options are being used where the acceptance criteria are met.

11. The Council have recently become a member of the national fly-tipping prevention group (NFTPG). This is a group chaired by Defra and includes representatives from central and local government, enforcement authorities, the waste industry and the police and fire service and aims to reduce fly-tipping through closer working and the sharing of best practice.

Begging Incidents

12. Begging incidents in the last four months (April-July 2025) show a significant decrease, with 58 recorded incidents. There have been dedicated patrols and joined-up partnership working.
13. There is currently a cohort of around 20 people begging mostly inactive due to the strategic approach. We are engaging through all available support mechanisms and offer various support through our dedicated 'out-reach worker' who engages and signpost them to the right service required.
14. We continue to carryout media campaigns on begging and educate the members of the public on ways to report incidents of begging. This is in-line with the multi-agency strategic approach through the four action pathways, empathy, engagement, education and enforcement.

Plan for Neighbourhoods

15. The Neighbourhood Board has been established and has met twice. The membership of the Board is as agreed for the earlier iteration of the programme, Long Term Plan for Towns: The Towns Board with addition representatives of the community and voluntary sectors.
16. The membership was submitted to MHCLG by 22 April and approved along with the proposed boundary which was revised to include South Park.
17. There have been two meetings of the Neighbourhood Board to date. At the meeting of May 13, the Board:
 - (a) Agreed Board membership and structure
 - (b) Agreed a revised geographic boundary including South Park
 - (c) Agreed to commission the voluntary and community sector to undertake community engagement
 - (d) Agreed to establish a Towns Fund subgroup to provide oversight of the Towns Fund initiative, reporting back to the main Board. Key areas of work would similarly be overseen by subgroups reporting back to the Board
 - (e) Agreed to establish links with existing relevant groups through members in common

18. At this meeting the board also considered data which would help identify areas of the town that are 'left behind
19. At the meeting of 24 June (minutes to be agreed) the Board, signed off the strategic vision as:

"To foster connected, inclusive, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods across Darlington that celebrate local identity, support community wellbeing, and can adapt to the evolving needs of residents—ensuring every neighbourhood is a great place to live, work, and thrive."

(a) Confirmed the Thematic Areas as,

- i. Driving Growth (Economic inclusion, town centre)
- ii. Thriving neighbourhoods (targeting 'left behind')

(b) Considered areas that would act as a locus for activity.

(c) It also concluded that Communities not defined by geographic boundaries, particularly people with disabilities, should be considered within the programme.

(d) The Board agreed to commission a Feasibility study of developing a STEM Centre on Central Park. The cost to be circulated to the Board.

(e) The Voluntary and Community sector have been commissioned to undertake community engagement over the summer. This will involve engagement in the town centre via the events team programme and also neighbourhoods through a series of community events. There will be interim feedback at September's Neighbourhood Board meeting and a full report for the October meeting.

Trading Standards

20. The team have given advice to a new trader, who is a home manufacturer of soft toys, on compliance with product safety legislation. A number of unsafe, counterfeit labubu dolls have been removed from stores and advice offered to the retailers on product safety legislation.
21. Financial Investigation work in conjunction with Durham Police has been undertaken in relation to illegal goods sellers in order to help build intelligence to tackle this area of criminality.
22. Work is ongoing to tackle a number of business premises who repeatedly supply illegal cigarettes. Several test purchases have taken place to identify these illegal sellers which have then been visited and illegal stock seized. These visits were principally undertaken during a day of action which included neighbourhood police and a tobacco dog detection company. Several large seizures were made, and action will be taken on these illegal suppliers.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

23. Since April 2025, the Private Sector Housing team have received nine applications for the Mandatory HMO Licensing scheme. There are currently 44 licensed properties capable of housing 156 people in Darlington. Around 20% of all properties in Darlington are privately rented, of which HMOs make up a small but valuable section of the sector. HMOs are typically occupied by single people who may have moved to the area to work or who those who are looking for affordable self-contained accommodation.

Renters' Rights Bill

24. The Private Sector Housing Team have continued to work with other Local Authorities in the Northeast in the introduction of the Renters Rights Bill. The Bill is expected to be enacted in the Autumn with Tenancy Reform, such as creating a new possession system which will end no fault evictions (section 21 notices), being implemented next Spring followed by other sections of the act such as the creation of a Landlords Portal (registration scheme) and new Decent Homes Standard for private tenancies being introduced at a later date.

Warm Homes Local Grant

25. 70 expressions of interest for the Warm Homes Local Grant fund to improve energy efficiency in owner occupied homes have been received from the Government for homes across the Tees Valley. It is expected that up to 150 properties will be improved this financial year.

Licensing

26. Darlington's taxi policy public consultation has now ended, and responses are being compiled for the Licensing Committee to consider. The Licensing Committee will then make recommendations to Full Council on a proposed new policy.
27. Licensing is about to commence a public consultation on Darlington's Street Trading Policy. Since it was last reviewed in 2025, there have been changes to the town centre and a decline in the number of traders using the current authorised locations.
28. Home Office Immigration Enforcement has submitted a Premises Licence Review application for The Oak Tree Public House, Middleton St George, following a visit where four people were found to be working illegally. The licence holders are Punch Taverns Plc, and a full public hearing was held by the Licensing Committee. The Home Office asked for a revocation of the licence as this seriously undermines the crime and disorder objective of the Licensing Act. Prior to the hearing, Punch Taverns (premises Licence Holder) removed the leaseholder responsible for the illegal worker offences. They had been unaware, and this was in direct breach of a tenancy agreement. The Home Office was happy that the Premises Licence Holder had acted promptly and responsibly, and conditions were agreed to prevent this from occurring in the future. These conditions were added to the premises licence by the Licensing Committee at last week's hearing

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

CQC Assurance Framework Update

2. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care (ASC) presented a report to update and inform Members on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance framework and inspection activity.
3. The Assistant Director, ASC, first outlined the CQC's inspection process, before presenting the final result received on 30 May 2025, an overall score of 73%, with an official 'GOOD' score.
4. The Assistant Director, ASC, 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.
5. The Assistant Director, ASC 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.
6. We posed questions regarding the area which required improvement, specifically regarding whether this was something the team was expecting. The Assistant Director, ASC, affirmed to Members that the score was close to 'Good', but are actively trying to improve this.
7. We concluded this area of discussion by congratulating the Adult Services team for their ongoing hard work, ability to respond to feedback, and fantastic result.

Assessment of Services Commissioned from Out of Area

8. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts introduced a report which provided the Committee with an overview of current Out of Area (OOA) placements in residential, nursing or respite care. I previously requested that this report also included reference to Day Opportunities following my CQC interview.
9. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts provided the Committee with the Association for Directors of Adult Social Services' definition of "Out of Area", and reminded us 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.

10. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts went on to inform us 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. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts also outlined the demographical context for those receiving care OOA.
11. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts informed us of Key areas for Development. Such areas included Day Opportunities, SEND Educational Providers, Skills for Life, health and Commissioning. It was also stated that Adult Services working alongside Beaumont College and Education colleagues are exploring the development of a local personalised learning pathway in Darlington for September 2026.
12. We then posed questions 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 recipients placed OOA are placed within, and receive continuous oversight over their care.

Performance Indicators End of Year 2024/2025

13. The Assistant Director, ASC, presented a report which provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators (KPI) for 2024/2025.
14. The report referred to the performance of 10 of the 12 indicators reported at the end of the year 2024/2025.
15. The Assistant Director, ASC, provided commentary over the figures, and informed the us that the service area is currently facing significant demand as a result of people being discharged from hospital. We were informed that the aim going forward is to continue to support a reablement approach for individuals to receive care from their homes.
16. We posed questions on the KPI's that weren't performing as well as last year, specifically on Self Directed Support. The Assistant Director, ASC, responded that the team have reviewed the direct payment procedure to ensure transparency with recipients over what the service is. The procedure has been adjusted to be easy to understand and apply. Additionally, it has become essential for all social workers to offer this as an option within the support planning process.

Work Programme 2024/25

17. The Democratic Officer spoke to this report and invited us and the Officers into discussion over rescheduling items as a result of a previous item being deferred. As a result, we

agreed to move the Domestic Abuse Strategy from the January Meeting to the October date, in order to allow the Medium-Term Financial Plan item to receive sufficient time to be scrutinised in January.

Supplementary Items which in the Opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an Urgent Nature and were Discussed at the Meeting.

18. Following my request during the Chair and Vice-Chair's pre-briefing with Officers, the Assistant Director, ASC, delivered an informal update on the Blue Badge Process as a result of its inclusion in the Forward Plan.
19. The Assistant Director, ASC, outlined the Government criteria for Blue Badges and how the team have incorporated this. Additionally, The Assistant Director, ASC, detailed the new procedures the team have adopted to meet the high demand, and informed us of the results in cutting wait times from 16 weeks to 5. We thanked the Assistant Director, ASC, for the team's efforts and commented on the relief felt amongst residents as a result.

Councillor Andrew Anderson
Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Performance Indicators – Quarter 4 2024-25

2. We welcomed the Assistant Director Children's Services who provided members with performance information for quarter 4 2024-25 in line with an indicator set agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs.
3. Points of note were provided to members which included the overall reduction in admissions of children to Children's Social Care alongside a reduction in Child Protection Plan numbers and fewer children overall requiring statutory social care aid. The numbers of children reported missing has also shown noticeable reductions and has been a subject of targeted work previously.
4. Areas for development were also highlighted which included Child Protection Investigation timeframes and continued work on improving placement stability.
5. Questions were raised which included the definition of "external agencies", being full trained members of partner agencies such as those working in education settings. It was also asked whether the timeframes for Child Protection Investigations can be adjusted with officers confirming that timeframes are not set on a local level. A member also asked for information on current staff retention with the response that recruitment and retention is currently at its most positive level for a number of years with the numbers of agency staff reducing as a result.
6. We noted the performance information provided and agreed to raise any relevant queries to the relevant Assistant Directors.

Work Programme

7. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year.

Councillor Hilary Allen
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Deployable Camera Policy

2. Members received a detailed report from The Assistant Director, Environmental Services and Community Safety, which provided Members with an overview of the policy and guidelines on issues involved in the planning for, and actual deployment of the Council's re-deployable (mobile) CCTV cameras (RCCTV).
3. The CCTV & Security Control Centre Manager provided a short synopsis of the Council's current deployment of deployable cameras deployed by request on the boundaries of the Borough.
4. The CCTV & Security Control Centre Manager informed the Committee that the use of surveillance is not a cure to civic enforcement issues, but is more so utilised as a preventative and aiding tool.
5. The CCTV & Security Control Centre Manager went into further detail on the policy by which deployable cameras are utilised, and demonstrated the Council's compliance with such regulations.
6. Members thanked The CCTV & Security Control Centre Manager for speaking to this report and questioned whether all deployable cameras at the Council's disposal are being actively utilised to ensure that the Council is maximising its available resources. The CCTV & Security Control Centre Manager answered stating that not all deployable cameras are currently active, and Members asked what the barriers are preventing this.
7. Members questioned about who can apply for a deployable camera, and the process of doing so. We were informed that the usual procedure is that a Councillor will make a request to the anti-social or park management team who will consider the request and determine whether a camera will be deployed.

Public Safety Overview Report

8. Following a request from the Vice-Chair at the annual briefing of this Scrutiny Committee, Members received a detailed report from the Assistant Director, Environmental Services and Community Safety which provided members with an overview of the ways in which the Council and its partners support public safety across the Borough.

9. Particular emphasis was placed the areas of Public Safety that members wished to receive more information on, particularly from a community safety perspective; namely the nighttime economy, events and partnership working.
10. The Head of Community Safety spoke to this report and began by discussing the risk management protocols undertaken by the Council and the Partnerships it works alongside to effectively manage those risks.
11. The Head of Community Safety also made reference to the Local Resilience Forum, the Darlington Community Safety Partnership, the Public Event Safety Advisory Group, Civic Enforcement, CCTV, and Licencing – demonstrating how all of such services contribute to Community Safety in the Borough.
12. Focus was then diverted to the Nighttime Economy, specifically on the actions undertaken by Number Forty and the future of this establishment. The Head of Community Safety discussed the origins of Number Forty and the expiry date for funding from the Home Office. The Head of Community Safety noted that volunteers are sparse currently, and that efforts are being made to drive engagement and garner volunteers.
13. Members then asked questions regarding the nature of incidents reported to Number Forty, and whether incident reporting had decreased as a result of less activity in the Nighttime Economy. The Head of Community Safety responded, stating that both less footfall and improved safety control have contributed to a decline in incident reporting.
14. We drew a close to this area of discussion by questioning the current priorities outlined on page 29 of the submitted report, issues regarding inflatables, and whether the Civic Enforcement Team is taking a proactive approach to Community Safety.

Performance Indicators Year End – Quarter 4 – 2024/2025

15. Members received a detailed report from The Head of Culture, the Assistant Director for Environmental Services and Public Safety, the Assistant Director for Highways and Capital Projects, and the Standards and Animal Health Manager who collaborated to produce a report regarding the Performance Indicators Year End – Quarter 4 – 2024/25 for their service area.
16. This report provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2024/25 up to year end March 2025 (Quarter 4).
17. The Assistant Director for Highways and Capital Projects spoke to this report, and outlined the performance for Cultural institutions such as the Hippodrome, Hopetown, and the library. The Performance of Community Services, Community Safety, Trading Standards and Animal Health, and Highways and Capital Projects were also discussed.
18. The Assistant Director for Highways and Capital Projects summarised the report and the overall performance of the service area, detailing how: a) 17 of the 34 indicators figures increased. b) 16 of the 34 indicators figures decreased. c) 1 of the 34 indicators remained the same. d) 1 indicator had no comparative information.

19. Members then posed questions to the Assistant Director for Highways and Capital Projects, specifically on the performance of Hopetown against the targeted figures prior to launch. Additionally, Members questioned the figures regarding road safety, notably the increasing numbers of serious incidents per week.

Work Programme 2025/2026

20. We discussed the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 Municipal Year. The Democratic Officer spoke to this report and invited Members to consider the attached draft work programme (Appendix 1).
21. Members requested an update on the Councillor Case Monitoring System Task and Finish Group, to which the Democratic Officer responded stating that the relevant Officer will be in contact to arrange a meeting with those Members interested in this Task and Finish Group.
22. Members also requested that the Harm Reduction on Highways Approach be moved from the October meeting of this Committee to the January meeting, which was agreed.

Councillor James McGill
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Consultation on a Homes Strategy for the Borough

2. The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection submitted a report for us to consider the Homes Strategy for the Borough which was agreed for consultation at Cabinet on 8 July 2025.
3. It was explained that the draft Homes Strategy 2025-2030 would provide a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners with regards to housing. The report also stated that the main focus of the strategy is to provide high quality homes across all tenures, to meet local needs and to address the borough's housing challenges. The strategy was designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of the council's approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.
4. The report stated that the strategy sets out high level vision and explained the three key objectives focused around building new homes, improving standards, meeting the needs of the ageing population and to support people to live independently. The report also included a number of associated outcomes and actions which are aimed to be achieved over the next five years.
5. We discussed the data sets that were included in the strategy, how the data collected was from 2021 and whether any new data had been collected and if there is any comparison.
6. We asked how promoting modern methods of construction will be carried out as part of the objectives for the strategy and how important affordable housing is for residents of Darlington and how do developers support this.
7. We touched on the difference between a commercial site and a brownfield site, and how many brownfield sites are left to be utilised.

Climate Change and Nature Strategy

8. The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection submitted a report to present the draft Climate Change and Nature Strategy to us.
9. The report explained that in May 2025, Council passed a resolution declaring a nature restoration emergency and combined it within the Council's existing climate change emergency. It stated the need to create wider variety of habitats in Darlington which would increase the resilience of our wildlife to Climate Change, human pressures and natural threats.

10. The report detailed how the target of a net zero Council by 2040 will remain and separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be explained to provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
11. We questioned how much nature has been lost that now needs to be restored, other queries included if swift and bat boxes could be included in developers plans and whether Darlington Borough Council would follow other local authority's reduction in climate change.

Performance Indicators Quarter 4 2024/2025

12. The Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection, Head of Culture, Assistant Director Law and Governance, Assistant Director Housing and Revenues, and Assistant Director Resources submitted a report providing us with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 4 2024/25.
13. It was reported that of the 22 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 18 were reported six monthly.
14. The submitted report gave the performance position in relation to the 22 indicators, of which 11 had increased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported, whilst 10 had decreased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported.
15. We questioned the reason behind the increase in staff sickness within the Human Resources indicators

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2024/2025

16. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report to provide us with the 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comment annual reports for Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Corporate, Housing and Public Health.
17. The submitted report stated that in 2024/25 a total number of 747 complaints had been received, an increase from 746 in 2023/24, 219 compliments had been received, a decrease from 231 in 2023/24; and 45 comments had been received, a decrease from 77 in 2023/24.

Complaints Made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and The Housing Ombudsman Service

18. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report providing an update of the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).
19. The submitted report set out in abbreviated form the decisions reached by the LGSCO and the HOS between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 and outlined the actions taken as a result of those complaints.

Project Position Statement and Capital Monitoring Quarter 1 2025/26

20. The Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services and Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report for us to consider the project position statement and capital programme monitoring Q1 2025/26 report.
21. The submitted report stated that the projected outturn of the current Capital Programme was £354.868m against an approved programme of £354.982m; the investment was delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and services; the programme, including commitments, remained affordable within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/2 to 2028/29; the Council had 19 live projects, with an overall projected outturn value of £131.234m, the majority of which were running to time, cost and quality expectations, but were being monitored given the current pressures on resources in the construction sector nationally; and that the projects were managed either by the Council's in-house management team, a Framework Partner or by Consultants source via an open/OJEU tender process.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2025/26 Report Quarter 1

22. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report to provide an early forecast of the 2025/26 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.
23. The submitted report stated that it was the first revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2025/26 and that the latest projections showed an overall decline of £2.166m on the 2025/29 Medium Term Financial Plan, which was due to £3.489m of departmental pressures and a decline in corporate resources of £0.166m, offset by £1.489m of additional balances following the 2024/25 outturn.

Investment Fund Update Report

24. The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report for us to consider the progress against the agreed investments through the investment fund.
25. The submitted report stated that in November 2016 the Council established an Investment Fund to be used for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy in order to achieve greater returns given the low returns on investment; the fund provision of £50m was being utilised as envisaged facilitating wide economic benefits as well as a direct impact on the Council's financial position; the £50m fund had a commitment against it of £35.81m leaving a balance of £14.19m uncommitted; the Investment Fund had been used for 17 schemes to date, six of which had been recycled back into the fund; and that returns on JV's were anticipated to be over £8.4m.
26. We questioned if any payments had been made in relation to the Market Asset Management and what the current position was with relation to the land at Coniscliffe Road.

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Consultation on a Homes Strategy for the Borough

2. We welcomed a report, requesting that consideration be given to the Homes Strategy for the Borough which has been agreed for consultation at Cabinet on 8 July 2025.
3. Members were advised that the draft Homes Strategy 2025-2030 provides a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners with regard to housing and the focus of the strategy is to provide high quality homes across all tenures, meeting local needs and addressing the borough's housing challenges
4. The strategy set a high level vision with three objectives focused around building new homes, improving standards, meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently. Members were informed of a number of associated outcomes and actions which aim to be achieved over the next five years.
5. We questioned the sustainability and energy efficiency of new developments and were informed that a supplementary planning document relating to material considerations for planning applications is in development.
6. We also discussed the availability and location of affordable and smaller properties across the Borough. Members noted that there is a requirement for a percentage of new homes to be adaptable to a certain standard and there is a section within the strategy which focused on housing mix in the borough.
7. We agreed to submit any comments on the draft Homes Strategy via the online survey by the deadline of 5 September 2025.

Darlington Better Care Fund 2024/25 End of Year Programme Report

8. We received a report updating Members on the Annual Report of the Darlington Better Care Fund (BCF) for the 2024/25 programme and providing an update on the next steps across the Programme.
9. Members noted the vision of the BCF and that the use of the BCF mandatory funding streams must be jointly agreed by integrated care boards (ICBs) and local authorities, with sign off by the Health and Wellbeing Board.
10. Details were provided of the two core BCF objectives and the four national conditions for funding, along with the four key metrics. We welcomed the information on the funding for

2024/25 along with a summary of the 2024/35 BCF Plan and approval feedback of the BCF 2024/25 Plan from the BCF National Team.

11. Members welcomed a joint review all funded schemes which began in July 2025, to ensure that all schemes continued to deliver against the key priorities of the programme and provided value for money.

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2024-2025 – Across the Life Course: The Health of Darlington

12. Members welcomed a report, presenting the Annual Public Health Report which provides a snapshot of key data across the life course and thematic recommendations. We noted the intention for future reports to focus on the different stages of the life course in greater detail.
13. We also welcomed an update on the recommendations made in the 2023-2024 Annual Public Health Report.
14. We discussed the work being undertaken to address sunbed usage and passive smoking with reference being made to the Tobacco and Vapes Bill which is giving consideration to the extension of smoke-free outdoor places to outside schools, children's playgrounds and hospitals and noted the Seven Steps Out campaign. Following concerns raised regarding air pollution, Members were informed that this is a growing area of interest within public health with increasing evidence highlighting the positive impact of low emission zones.
15. Questions were raised regarding the work undertaken around falls and the prevalence of breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks. Members were informed of the work being undertaken with the 0-19 services to undertake the mandated 10-14 day visits at day 8 as part of a targeted pilot, which has seen an increase in breastfeeding of 11 per cent in those areas.
16. We also raised concerns regarding the prevalence of tooth decay for 5-year-olds in Darlington and Members noted the work being undertaken to improve outcomes including the development of the oral health promotion strategy and expansion of the supervised toothbrushing scheme.
17. Members also discussed the children in care immunisations, monitoring of the uptake of and use of vapes by children and young people in Darlington, and the role of public health in supporting the use of weight loss injections, as part of a broader approach which still emphasises the importance of prevention.
18. We sought an update regarding the outbreaks of Carbapenemase-Producing Enterobacterales (CPE) at Darlington Memorial Hospital and were pleased to note that the number of cases has reduced and noted the additional work that has been introduced to manage and reduce the outbreaks.

Health and Safety Compliance in Council Housing 2024-25

19. We received a report from the Assistant Director Housing and Revenue, updating Members on Health and Safety Compliance standards for Council housing stock and performance against these in 2024/25.

20. The report provided details of the areas where compliance is monitored on a regular basis, including asbestos, damp and mould, electrical safety, fire risk assessments, fire doors, gas safety, smoke alarms, legionella, radon, lifts and stairlifts.
21. Members of this Scrutiny committee commended the Housing Team for the Council's performance against the health and safety compliance standards for Council housing stock for 2024-25.

Chronic Illness Prevention

22. We received a report providing Members with an overview of the impact of long-term conditions (LTC) on Darlington's population, drawing on key national and local data to highlight current challenges and outlining evidence-based actions to reduce the burden of LTCs through prevention and improved care planning.
23. Members were advised that LTCs are ongoing health issues that cannot be cured but effectively managed with the right support, common examples being diabetes, coronary heart disease and that the number of people living in Darlington with these conditions is rising, particularly among older adults.
24. It was reported that complex health needs are more concentrated in areas of deprivation and is linked to earlier onset and higher rates of long-term conditions. We also noted details of the Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings across Darlington, emergency hospital admissions for COPD and percentage of economically inactive in each ward.
25. Members noted that the prevalence of long-term conditions has steadily increased over the past decade, and that this was likely to continue as the population aged and lifestyle related risks factors remained.
26. It was reported that a prevention-focused approach to long-term conditions was key to improving health outcomes, reducing inequalities and easing pressure on services; and reference was made to a model of three levels of prevention in public health.
27. We discussed in particular the concentration of LTC's in more deprived areas and how this could be addressed.

Performance Indicators Year End – Quarter 4 2024/25

28. We received an update on performance against key performance indicators for 2024/25 at Quarter 4. We noted that of the 13 indicators with comparative data available, when taking into consideration what is best performance for the indicator, that six indicators had increased when compared to the same period in the previous year and that seven indicators had decreased when compared to the same period in the previous year.
29. We also noted that of the eight indicators that had been updated since Quarter 2 that, when taking into consideration what is best performance for the indicator, that five indicators had seen an increase whilst three had seen a decrease.

Work Programme

30. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2025/26 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Councillor Neil Johnson
Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee