



Council Agenda

6.00 pm, Thursday, 26 March 2026

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington, DL1 5QT

Members of the Public are welcome to attend this Meeting.

1. Introductions / Attendance at Meeting.
2. Minutes - To approve the Minutes of the Meetings of this Council held on 29 January 2025 and 19 February 2026 (Pages 9 - 32)
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) Constitution Update – Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance. (Pages 33 - 36)
8. Cabinet Reports.

- (a) Overview Report of the Leader of the Council; (Pages 37 - 40)
 - (b) Overview Report of the Economy Portfolio; (Pages 41 - 46)
 - (c) Overview Report of the Adults Portfolio; (Pages 47 - 50)
 - (d) Overview Report of the Children and Young People Portfolio; (Pages 51 - 58)
 - (e) Overview Report of the Health and Housing Portfolio; (Pages 59 - 66)
 - (f) Overview Report of the Local Services Portfolio; (Pages 67 - 74)
 - (g) Overview Report of the Resources Portfolio; and (Pages 75 - 76)
 - (h) Overview Report of the Stronger Communities Portfolio; (Pages 77 - 82)
9. Scrutiny Reports - To consider Scrutiny Overview Reports:-
- (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 83 - 84)
 - (b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 85 - 88)
 - (c) Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee; (Pages 89 - 90)
 - (d) Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee; and (Pages 91 - 92)
 - (e) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. (Pages 93 - 96)
10. Notice of Motions
- (a) To consider a Motion submitted by Councillor Toms and seconded by Councillor Roche
- Motion for Darlington to become an Inclusive Recovery City (IRC)**
- Preamble**
- a) Addictions to alcohol, illicit and prescribed drugs and gambling exacts a huge social and emotional toll on the people of Darlington;
 - b) Addiction costs lives, destroys families and communities and undermines neighbourhoods and communities;
 - c) People can and do recover although the real rate of recovery (at around 60%) is not widely known or understood;
 - d) What helps people to recover is being a part of social networks that are supportive of recovery change;

- e) Fundamentally, the secret to addiction recovery can be characterised as Jobs, Friends and Houses or ‘somewhere to live, someone to love and something to do’.

The North-East of England has been at the forefront of innovation in addiction recovery and Darlington has the potential to be at the heart of this movement, based on the supports and services that already exist in the town.

Recovery is increasingly recognised as a peer-driven social movement that is most clearly articulated within a public health model based on social contagion where visibility is essential for the effective transmission of recovery.

Across the UK – and increasingly globally – the Inclusive Recovery Cities movement has articulated the following goals:

- a) To increase the visibility of recovery through public-facing events that showcase the talents of the recovery community;
- b) These events also provide opportunities for volunteering for people in recovery and their families;
- c) They are targeted at the general public as an act of citizenship to challenge stigma and exclusion;
- d) Overall, the goal is to increase social cohesion and improve community involvement inspired by people previously stigmatised and marginalised.

Ultimately the aim of this movement is to increase the capacity of individuals and families in recovery to access education, housing and employment and to increase active citizenship and community participation.

This Council recognises that:

- a) Supporting addiction recovery is beneficial not only to people in recovery and their families, but to the whole community;
- b) Darlington has strong foundations for social inclusion and to promote addiction recovery as a social movement;
- c) The commitment to social inclusion will improve active citizenship and community participation right across the community;
- d) There is a need for a strategic and coherent approach to coordinating recovery support across the council area and to build a visible recovery community.

This Council resolves:

To endorse Darlington as an Inclusive Recovery City by:

- a) Adopting the Mission, Vision and Values;
 - b) Signing the IRC Charter;
 - c) Championing and supporting co-ordinated visible recovery across Darlington;
 - d) Support the public health team to deliver the full implementation of the IRC model in Darlington;
 - e) Play an active role in the evaluation of IRC implementation in Darlington after one year.
- (b) To consider a Motion submitted by Councillor Dulston and seconded by Councillor Durham

Protection and Long-Term Security of Community Green Spaces

This Council notes that:

- a) Bellburn Field, the Triangle of Land off Sparrowhall Drive, and Tommy Crooks Park are valued community green spaces that provide significant environmental, recreational, and social benefits to local residents.
- b) These spaces contribute positively to physical and mental wellbeing, biodiversity, and community cohesion.
- c) Local residents have consistently expressed strong support for the preservation, improvement, and long-term protection of these sites.
- d) Once public green spaces are lost to development or sale, they are rarely replaced, leading to permanent harm to local communities.

This Council believes that:

- a) Publicly owned green spaces should be protected for current and future generations.
- b) Investment in community parks and open land is essential to improving quality of life and supporting healthier, safer neighbourhoods.
- c) Clear guarantees regarding the future of these sites will provide reassurance to residents and strengthen trust in the Council's stewardship of public assets.

This Council resolves to:

- a) Formally designate Bellburn Field, the Triangle of Land off Sparrowhall Drive, and Tommy Crooks Park as protected community green spaces.

- b) Commit to increased and sustained investment in the maintenance, improvement, and accessibility of these sites.
 - c) Give a clear and binding commitment that Darlington Borough Council will not sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of these pieces of land for development or private ownership.
 - d) Ensure that any future decisions relating to these sites involve meaningful consultation with local residents.
 - e) Request that officers explore appropriate legal or policy mechanisms to secure long-term protection of these spaces within council policy and planning frameworks.
- (c) To consider a Motion submitted by Councillor Dulston and seconded by Councillor Walker

Women's Privacy, Dignity, and Safety Across Darlington

Preamble:

The Supreme Court has reaffirmed the legal authority of single-sex spaces under the Equality Act 2010, recognising sex as a biological and an objective fact.

Women - because of their biological sex - face unique vulnerabilities and risks that necessitate protected female-only spaces. This need is not contingent on requiring a certain volume or veracity of requests or complaints. Women's voices have historically been undervalued, ignored and, at times, silenced.

Countless women rely on single-sex provision for their privacy, dignity, personal safety, trauma recovery, and ability to participate fully in public life without distraction or fear.

Council provision and services, such as changing rooms, toilets and care settings, depend on coherent and objective criteria to operate according to best practice, including safeguarding.

This Council recognises that:

1. Women have the right to safety, dignity, and privacy based on their sex, a right grounded in both law and lived experience.
2. Recognising biological sex is not discriminatory. That women should never be made to apologise for requiring female-only spaces, nor should their legitimate concerns be dismissed as prejudice.
3. All individuals remain protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

This Council resolves:

1. To fully implement with immediate effect, the Supreme Court ruling across all Darlington Borough Council buildings, services, policies and commissioned activities, to ensure that the council complies with the law. In preparation, the council will urgently engage legal expertise and establish an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group of councillors, staff, stakeholders and legal expertise.
2. That the EDI Working Group will set a timescale with milestones and objectives to:
 - a) Review all policies to ensure that all provision covers the following:
 - i) the lawful use of single sex services under the Equality Act 2010;
 - ii) that the dignity, privacy, safety and equality of opportunity of women is protected;
 - iii) that all individuals with protected characteristics are treated lawfully, respectfully and fairly; and
 - iv) that staff have clear, workable procedures and impartial, lawful training.
 - b) Provide clear written guidance, for staff, service users, and the public detailing the following:
 - i) how single sex spaces will be managed;
 - ii) the legal basis for any single sex provision;
 - iii) how the safety and dignity of women will be protected;
 - iv) how the council continues to uphold the right of all protected groups; and
 - v) this guidance will be published ensuring transparency, accuracy and legal compliance.
 - c) Ensure all staff and councillors receive training on:
 - i) the legal definition of sex and Equality Act 2010 eg the interaction with the other Protected Characteristics and the Councils' Public Sector Equality Duty;
 - ii) the reality of discrimination and violence faced by women on account of their sex; and
 - iii) the lawful basis for single-sex provision (separate & single sex exceptions).
3. To reaffirm the Council's commitment to women's rights as foundational. Protecting women safety and respecting the rights of others are not mutually exclusive; the Council will continue to uphold both in line with the law and our public sector duties.
4. To support the government's national 'Violence Against Women And Girls

Strategy' and work in partnership towards halving violence against women and girls by 2030 with a focus on prevention and support for survivors through a whole systems approach by the following:

- a) championing women's safety;
 - b) thereby promoting respectful and inclusive public spaces;
 - c) working collaboratively with partners; and
 - d) supporting early intervention and prevention.
5. That any cost implications will be met from existing resources, subject to normal, financial governance processes and clarity of requirements.
6. To act responsibly and lawfully to achieve these aims, ensuring that the dignity, privacy and safety of women is restored and safeguarding the rights of all individuals we serve. We will move forward with clarity, compassion and a firm commitment to equality, ensuring our approach is compliant with the law and informed by best practice.

Note: This Council use 'woman', as per the Equality Act 2010, meaning a female of any age.

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



Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Wednesday, 18 March 2026

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, Robinson, Roche, Mrs Scott, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Michael Walker, 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, 29 January 2026

PRESENT – The Mayor, Councillors 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, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Michael Walker, Wallis and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali and Mrs Scott

ABSENT – Councillors Robinson

67 MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 2 OCTOBER 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Council held on 2 October 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Council held on 2 October 2025 be approved as a correct record.

68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest recorded at this meeting.

69 SEALING.

70 ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Recognition of Allison McKay MBE

The Mayor congratulated Allison McKay, CEO of The Forum Music Studios, on being awarded an MBE in the King's New Year Honours List 2026 for services to music.

Recognition of Troy Williamson

The Mayor congratulated local boxer Troy Williamson on winning the British, Commonwealth and European super-middleweight titles on 20 December.

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Mayor marked Holocaust Memorial Day, reflecting on the theme '*Bridging Generations*' and inviting a 30-second pause in remembrance.

Thanks to Captain John "JJ" Wilson

The Mayor expressed appreciation to Captain JJ Wilson as he steps down as Parade Master, thanking him for decades of military and community service.

Welcoming Councillor Michael Walker

The Mayor formally welcomed Cllr Michael Walker to his first Ordinary Council Meeting following his recent by-election win.

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

72 THE PUBLIC;

There were fourteen questions, received with notice, from Members of the Public.

Thirteen 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.

Members took a vote on whether to refer four of the submitted questions to Cabinet for discussion.

RESOLVED – That two of the questions submitted on notice by members of the Public be referred to Cabinet for discussion.

73 MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;

There were five questions, received with notice, submitted by Councillor Walker to Members of the Cabinet.

Councillor Walker attended the meeting to ask the submitted questions and received answers thereon from the relevant Cabinet Members.

74 COUNCIL REPORTS.

75 REVIEW OF POLICY AND CONDITIONS RELATING TO HACKNEY CARRIAGES, PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES AND THEIR DRIVERS AND OPERATORS FOLLOWING CONSULTATION.

The Executive Director – Economy and Public Protection, submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited all Members to approve the recommendations made by the Licensing Committee to amend Darlington's Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy following public consultation.

The submitted report outlined that Darlington's Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy had last been reviewed in January 2021, with amendments made in 2022 following an interim review. The Licensing Committee had approved the current policy for public consultation, which closed on 10 August 2025. Responses were collated, and a revised draft policy was produced to reflect those submissions.

Following detailed discussion and representations from the taxi and private hire trade, the Licensing Committee formulated recommendations to be considered at this Ordinary Meeting of the Council in relation to any proposed changes to the policy.

The Council noted that the Licensing Committee had identified a number of amendments for inclusion in the revised Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy. The proposed changes were as follows:

- (a) Disability awareness training was to become mandatory, subject to the preparation of appropriate course materials.
- (b) Inward-facing CCTV was not to be made compulsory, but voluntary installation would be encouraged, provided proprietors complied with Information Commissioner's Office requirements.
- (c) Drivers would be required to offer a card payment option to customers.
- (d) Vehicles under three years old would be subject to a single annual mechanical inspection.
- (e) Drivers would be required to maintain daily records of vehicle inspections.
- (f) Amendments would be made to the private hire signage requirements.
- (g) A points-based system for minor breaches would be introduced, subject to further development and subsequent approval by the Licensing Committee.
- (h) The requirement for fire extinguishers to be carried in vehicles would be retained.

RESOLVED – That Full Council approved the recommendations of the Licensing Committee for amendments to be made to Darlington's Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy.

Reasons – This decision ensured that the Council's licensing framework remained up to date, reflected current best practice, and responded to issues raised during consultation with the taxi and private hire trade. The amendments were intended to enhance public safety, improve service standards, and provide clarity and consistency across the policy, while supporting the effective regulation of licensed vehicles, drivers, and operators within the Borough.

76 REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE - CHANGES TO THE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Director – Resources and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the outcome of the review of the political balance of the Authority following the Red Hall and Lingfield By-Election held on 11 December 2025, and the resulting recalculation of the percentage allocation of seats to political parties and non-aligned Independents.

It was reported that, since the last review in November 2024, the political composition of the Council had changed due to the resignation of Councillor Dr. Riley and the subsequent election of Councillor Walker. Members were reminded that seats on committees were required to be allocated in accordance with the statutory political balance rules, as outlined within the report.

As a result of the altered political makeup, the Council was required to review and amend the allocation of seats to reflect the revised entitlement of each political group.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the change to the political balance of the Council be noted.

(b) That it be agreed that the Labour Group lose one seat from each of the following Committees:

- (i) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee; and
- (ii) LA Governors Appointments Committee.

(c) That it be agreed that Councillor M. Nicholson cease to be a member of the LA Governors Appointments Committee.

(d) That it be agreed that Councillor Walker be appointed to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the LA Governors Appointments Committee.

(e) That the Labour Group vacancy on the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee be filled by Councillor Beckett.

(f) That it be noted that the Adults Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee would continue to have one seat each that remained unallocated at this time.

Reasons – To reflect the changed political balance of the Council following the by-election, and to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements governing the allocation of committee seats.

77 CONSTITUTION UPDATE

The Executive Director- Resources and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking approval of a series of updates to the Council's Constitution. Members were advised that the proposed changes were intended to support the effective operation of the Council and to provide additional clarity within the Council Procedure Rules. It was reported that periodic updates to the Constitution were necessary as a matter of good housekeeping to ensure that it remained accurate and fit for purpose.

Council noted the proposed amendment to Paragraph 13 of the Council Procedure Rules concerning questions from members of the public. Members were informed that, although Special and Extraordinary Council meetings were convened for specific purposes and had always accepted public questions only when relating to business on the published agenda, this had not been explicitly stated in the Constitution and had led to confusion. The revised wording therefore clarified that questions submitted for Special or Extraordinary meetings must directly relate to an item on the agenda.

Council also considered a proposal to remove from the Constitution seven administrative forms (ECC1 to ECC7) currently appended to the Code of Conduct for Employees. Members were informed that keeping these operational forms within the Constitution required any future updates to be returned to Council for formal approval, which was not an efficient use of time or resources. The Code itself would remain within the Constitution, but the removal of the forms would allow them to be amended administratively as required.

Council further noted the requirements of the Local Government and Social Care

Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which advised that a Cabinet Member should be designated as the Member responsible for complaints. Members were informed that the role was most appropriately assigned to a Cabinet Member with corporate responsibilities. It was therefore proposed that the Portfolio Holder for Resources be designated as the Member responsible for complaints, with the corresponding update to be made within Part 2 of the Constitution (Responsibility for Functions: Schedule 2 – Cabinet Portfolios).

RESOLVED –

(a) That the updates and changes to the Constitution, as detailed in the report, be approved.

(b) That the Monitoring Officer be delegated to update the Constitution to reflect the agreed changes.

Reasons – To ensure that the Constitution remained clear, accurate, up to date and fit for purpose, and to ensure compliance with the expectations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in relation to oversight of complaint handling.

78 CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE RECOVERY PROGRESS

The Executive Director – Economy and Public Protection, submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an update on progress towards the Council's net zero target and its nature recovery ambition, in line with the Climate and Nature Emergency Declaration which required six-monthly reporting. Members noted that emissions data was only available annually and, as such, no updated figures were yet available for the current year.

It was reported that the increase in emissions recorded for 2024/25 was partly attributed to the opening of Hoptown and ongoing works at the Dolphin Centre. Council also noted that investigations were continuing into the rise in emissions at Allington Way, for which a definitive explanation had not yet been identified.

Members were informed that the Climate Change Officer had been working with services across the Council to revise the climate change action plan. A new tool had been developed to identify potential projects requiring future funding, and the Council continued to work with the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub to explore external funding opportunities.

Council further noted that, following the nature recovery emergency motion approved in May 2025, a combined climate change and nature strategy had been approved by Cabinet in September. The Ecologist was developing a nature recovery action plan aligned with the regional nature recovery strategy being prepared for the Tees Valley. Work was also underway to gather data for the Council's statutory biodiversity duty report, due for submission at the end of March. Members were advised that the Ecologist was additionally reporting to Natural England on the management status of all Council-managed Local Wildlife Sites.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Reasons – To support the Council’s declared commitments to act on climate change and nature depletion. Failure to progress this work would risk significant reputational damage and undermine the Council’s stated ambition to address its contribution to climate change and support nature recovery.

79 MID-YEAR PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT 2025/26

The Executive Director – Resources and Governance, submitted a report which sought approval of the revised Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators, and provided an update on the Council’s borrowing and investment activities for 2025/26. Members were reminded that the Prudential Code required Council approval of prudential controls governing capital spending and borrowing, and that this mid-year report followed Council’s approval of the 2025/26 Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy in February 2025.

Council noted that the report met the regulatory requirements of the treasury management framework and supported the monitoring of the capital expenditure plans and associated Prudential Indicators. Members were informed that the revised figures related solely to the 2025/26 financial year, with indicators for future years to be updated once the implications of the Medium-Term Financial Plan from 2026/27 onwards were known.

A summary of the revised headline indicators for 2025/26 was presented, reflecting movements in the Capital Medium-Term Financial Plan since February 2025. The capital expenditure plans, together with the prudential indicators for capital spending, were set out as the framework for subsequent treasury management activity. Members noted that these updates supported the expectations of the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and government investment guidance, ensuring appropriate Member scrutiny of treasury activities.

Members were advised that the report provided updates on capital expenditure plans, financing arrangements, the impact of changes on Prudential Indicators and the borrowing requirement, compliance with borrowing controls, investment strategy updates, and the revised financing costs budget.

Council received revised estimates of capital expenditure, reductions in forecast capital programme spending for 2025/26, and updated projections for schemes expected to slip into future years. The revised financing arrangements for the capital programme were presented, with changes to the borrowing requirement highlighted.

The Council’s Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), actual borrowing position, and revisions

to the Operational Boundary were set out, together with confirmation that the statutory requirement for gross borrowing not to exceed the CFR over the medium term continued to be met. Members noted the proposed adjustments to the Authorised Limit for external debt, made in line with the updated CFR.

Council also received an update on treasury activity, interest-rate forecasts, and the broader economic context, noting expected movements in inflation and interest rates. Members were informed that there were no proposed policy changes to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement approved in February 2025.

The report outlined the Council's debt activity during the year, including the use of short-term borrowing, consideration of the early repayment of a loan, and the likelihood of continued under-borrowing at year end. Council also noted updates on property funds, including the merger involving Hermes Federated, the resulting distribution received by the Council and its use to repay short-term debt, and the anticipated further receipts from the Lothbury Fund.

Members were advised that no debt rescheduling had been undertaken due to prevailing market conditions. The Council's investment activity was reported in detail, with £38.699m held in investments as at 31 August 2025, and investment performance exceeding market benchmarks.

Council noted the updated Treasury Management Budget and the forecast overspend for 2025/26, attributed to the loss of returns from the Hermes property fund and borrowing costs remaining higher than originally anticipated.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the revised prudential indicators and limits set out in Tables 1 to 6, 8, 10 and 12 to 17 of the report be examined.
- (b) That the projected outturn for the Treasury Management Budget (Financing Costs), as shown in Table 11, be noted.
- (c) That the updated Prudential Indicators be approved.

Reasons –

- (a) To comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.
- (b) To inform Members of the performance of the Treasury Management function.
- (c) To comply with the Local Government Act 2003.

(d) To support continued improvements in the Council's Treasury Management arrangements.

80 COUNCIL TAX CALCULATION OF TAX BASE 2026/27

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance Submitted a report seeking approval of the Council's tax base for 2026/27. Members were reminded that, in accordance with Section 33 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the tax base was required to be determined by 31 January in the year preceding that to which it applied, and be notified to precepting authorities. The relevant calculations were presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

Members were informed that the tax base represented the number of domestic properties within the Borough expressed as Band D equivalents, adjusted for discounts, exemptions, changes in the housing stock and the estimated collection rate. Members noted that the tax base was a key component in the calculation of Council Tax for the forthcoming financial year.

It was reported that the council tax base reflected the taxable capacity of the area after taking account of dwellings eligible for reductions under the local council tax support scheme, and increases resulting from premiums applied to empty and long-term empty homes. Council noted that, unlike the previous council tax benefit system, local council tax support directly affected the tax base calculation due to the loss of income from dwellings receiving reductions.

Members were advised that the regulations prescribed the methodology for calculating the tax base across all valuation bands, including adjustments for disabled band reductions and anticipated changes up to 31 March 2027. The relevant amounts for each band were then converted into Band D equivalents, with the estimated collection rate and Ministry of Defence contributions applied to produce the final figure.

Council noted that the calculations for 2026/27, set out in Appendix 1, resulted in a total of 36,489.4 Band D equivalents, which, after applying the 99.0% collection rate and contributions in lieu, produced an overall tax base of 36,141.55, representing a 0.66% increase on 2025/26. Council further noted that equivalent calculations had been completed for each parish, shown in Appendix 2, using the same collection rate.

RESOLVED –

(a) That the report for the calculation of the Council's tax base for 2026/27 be approved.

(b) That the tax base for the Council of 36,141.55, and the individual parish tax bases set out in Appendix 2, be approved.

Reasons – To comply with statutory requirements and to enable the Council Tax for 2026/27 to be set by Council in February 2026.

(1) COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT - SCHEME APPROVAL 2026/27

The Executive Director – Resources and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking approval of the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for 2026/27. Members were reminded that Council had approved the local CTS scheme for 2025/26 on 28 November 2024, with the scheme becoming operational on 1 April 2025.

It was reported that Councils were required to set a CTS scheme annually and, as part of that process, to consider whether any changes should be made to the existing scheme and whether transitional protection should be applied to those affected by any such changes. Council noted that the report set out the details of the CTS scheme for 2026/27 and that no significant changes were proposed. Members were advised that the report had been considered by Cabinet on 4 November 2025, who had agreed its onward submission to Council for approval.

Council was informed that local CTS schemes had replaced Council Tax Benefit in 2013 and were funded through the Council's general resources and Council Tax income. The estimated cost of the CTS scheme for 2025/26 had been £9.7m. Members were reminded that a full public consultation and equality impact assessment had been undertaken when the scheme was first introduced in 2013.

Council noted that the key feature of Darlington's CTS scheme continued to be that working-aged people were eligible for a maximum of 80% support towards their Council Tax liability, while care leavers under the age of 25 were exempt from Council Tax and therefore unaffected by the scheme. Pensioners remained protected under national regulations.

It was reported that no changes were recommended to the local scheme for 2026/27; however, Members were advised that applicable amounts and non-dependant deductions had been uprated for 2026/27 in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, and that other technical amendments required by those regulations had been incorporated. These changes did not constitute alterations to the local CTS scheme. Council also noted that the recommendations had no significant financial implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED –

(a) That the contents of the report be considered.

(b) That the Council Tax Support scheme for 2026/27, as set out at Appendix 1, be approved.

Reasons –

(a) To comply with the requirement to publish a local CTS scheme for 2026/27 by 11 March 2026.

(b) Because the Council's CTS schemes since 2013 had been implemented successfully without major challenge.

(c) Because retaining a reduced entitlement for working-aged people remained appropriate given the current financial position of the Council.

81 CABINET REPORTS.

Council noted that, due to the lateness of the hour, a motion was moved and carried to note all remaining Cabinet reports without further debate.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet reports be noted.

Reasons – To enable the timely conclusion of the meeting while ensuring that Cabinet business scheduled for consideration was formally received.

82 SCRUTINY REPORTS - TO CONSIDER SCRUTINY OVERVIEW REPORTS:-

Council further noted that a motion was moved and carried to note all Scrutiny Committee reports without discussion, in view of the time.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Committee reports be noted.

Reasons – To acknowledge receipt of the Scrutiny Committee updates and to allow the meeting to conclude within practical time limits.

83 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(2) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR TOMS AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR ROCHE

Council considered a motion submitted by Councillor Toms and seconded by Councillor Roche. During the meeting, Councillor Toms withdrew the motion and requested that it be deferred to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED – That the motion submitted by Councillor Toms and seconded by Councillor Roche be withdrawn and deferred to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Council.

Reasons – To allow further consideration of the motion prior to its resubmission at the next scheduled Ordinary Meeting.

84 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) That it be agreed that Councillor M. Nicholson cease to be a member of the LA Governors Appointments Committee.

(b) That it be agreed that Councillor Walker be appointed to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the LA Governors Appointments Committee.

(c) That the Labour Group vacancy on the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee be filled by Councillor Beckett.

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COUNCIL

Thursday, 19 February 2026

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

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali, Coe and Mammolotti

ABSENT – Councillors Laing and Robinson

85 ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Death in Service, Glenda Deighton – The Mayor announced the death in service of Glenda Deighton, and made reference to Glenda's 37 years' service as a Residential Childcare worker for the Council.

Members stood and observed a short silence in respect of Glenda Deighton.

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

87 THE PUBLIC;

There were two questions, received with notice, from Members of the Public. One Member of the Public attended the meeting to ask their question in person and 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.

88 MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;

There were seven questions, received with notice, submitted by Councillor Walker to Members of the Cabinet.

Councillor Walker attended the meeting to ask the submitted questions and received answers thereon from the relevant Cabinet Members.

89 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to seek approval for a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026/27 to 2029/30, including setting a budget and Council Tax increase for 2026/27, and also to approve the 2026/27 to 2029/30 Capital Programme.

The submitted report stated that, following years of austerity, the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan remained in a fragile position. Members were reminded that reductions in public spending between 2010 and 2019 had resulted in a real-terms reduction of £46m to the Council's budget, and that the impact of significantly increased demand for services following the Covid pandemic, alongside an unstable economic climate with rising inflation, increased cost of living and rising poverty, continued to pose considerable challenges.

The submitted report stated that the Council was facing a spiralling increase in the cost and demand for Children's and Adults' Social Care, which together accounted for over two-thirds of total expenditure. Inflation, the national living wage and interest rate levels continued to directly affect the cost of adult care contracts, while demand for children's services had continued to rise since the pandemic, with significant increases in contacts, referrals and the number of children in care. These pressures, combined with the statutory responsibility to provide these services, impacted on the funding available for all other Council services, particularly discretionary areas which kept the town clean, vibrant and safe.

It was reported that Darlington was not alone in facing these pressures, with councils across the country experiencing similar difficulties and many reporting significant concerns regarding their ability to balance their budgets. The submitted report stated that the Council had previously met challenges through value for money service delivery, shared services, economic growth and strong financial management, utilising reserves to continue delivering vital services for residents.

The submitted report stated that the Government recognised the outdated nature of the local government funding model and the significant pressures facing public services. Members were informed that, following a comprehensive consultation on Local Government Fair Funding Reform (FFR2.0), the Government had published a draft three-year finance settlement on 17 December 2025, with the final settlement issued on 9 February 2026.

It was reported that Darlington had benefitted from the redistribution of funding through an increase in Core Spending Power (CSP) of 14.9% between 2025/26 and 2028/29. This included additional grant funding of £3.2m in 2026/27, a further £1.0m in 2027/28 and £0.7m in 2028/29. Members noted that the CSP assumed councils would increase Council Tax by 5% per annum, including the Adult Social Care precept. The MTFP therefore proposed a Council Tax increase of 2.99% and an Adult Social Care precept of 2%, generating £2.117m and £1.416m respectively. The submitted report stated that Adult Social Care remained the Council's largest budget area, with expenditure of £59.3m, and that the precept was crucial to meeting the pressures within this service. Despite the increased funding, the position remained challenging, with reserves required over the next two years to meet the sustainability gap.

The submitted report stated that, in addition to increased government funding, the Council continued to review its cost base to secure value for money. Transformation programmes identified in the 2025/26 MTFP were progressing well and delivering anticipated savings, and

further transformation programmes had been identified on a spend-to-save basis.

The submitted report outlined the Council Plan priorities and vision for Darlington, which focused on economic growth, housing, health and wellbeing, children and young people, communities, and the local environment. Members were informed that the MTFP had been shaped to support these priorities by directing available resources to areas where the most impact could be achieved. The report highlighted the importance of inclusive economic growth in addressing financial and health inequalities, and the progress already made in attracting government departments, securing business growth, investing in transport infrastructure and delivering new Council housing.

The submitted report stated that the Council operated a core offer based on statutory service provision, with limited discretionary services. Reserves had been maintained as a key component of medium-term stability and were proposed to be utilised to meet the funding gap across 2026/27 and 2027/28 while the effects of funding reforms took shape. This was described as a prudent approach to maintaining statutory services, protecting a proportion of discretionary services, and supporting preventative work that reduced future demand.

It was reported that, if the recommendations in the report were approved, the Council would deliver a 2026/27 budget allowing for net revenue investment of £149m and new capital investment of £84m, in addition to the existing £340m capital programme.

The following Amendment was moved by Councillor Dulston and seconded by Councillor Durham:

Introduction of a Lane Rental Scheme within the Borough of Darlington

This amendment proposes that Darlington Borough Council develop and bring forward a Lane Rental Scheme for consideration, with the following key objectives:

To minimise disruption for residents and reduce environmental impact by encouraging roadworks to be completed on time and right first time.

To improve public satisfaction with road conditions.

To generate additional income that can be reinvested into highway maintenance, congestion reduction initiatives and parking improvements.

Background

The mechanism for Lane Rental schemes was enabled under Section 74A of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. The first pilot schemes were introduced in 2012 and supported by the Street Works (Charges for Occupation of the Highway) (England) Regulations 2012. These regulations prescribe a maximum daily lane rental charge of £2,500. Under the regulations, any surplus generated by a Lane Rental scheme must be reinvested as follows: 50% of net surplus funds must be spent on highway maintenance. The remaining 50% must be used to reduce disruption and other adverse effects caused by street works.

Local Context

Data obtained through a Freedom of Information request shows that six of Darlington's major roads are subject to an average of approximately 4,500 days per annum of roadworks presence. Even assuming that 75% of those days relate to Darlington Borough Council's own works, and assuming a conservative 50% improvement in roadwork efficiency, a Lane Rental scheme charging £2,000 per day (below the £2,500 statutory maximum) could generate an estimated gross income of approximately £1.13 million per annum.

Rationale

Council recognises this is an innovative, "spend-to-save" proposal that has the potential to: Significantly reduce disruption for residents and businesses.

Improve journey reliability and satisfaction with the highway network.

Provide a meaningful and ringfenced income stream for highway improvements and congestion reduction measures.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

Instruct officers to allocate the necessary internal resources to develop a detailed Lane Rental Scheme proposal and implementation plan, to be brought forward to Council for consideration prior to any formal submission to the appropriate regulatory body for approval.

Agree that, while upfront costs are expected to be limited, provision of up to £10,000 be identified within the current MTFP as a marker to cover any necessary legal advice and preparatory work.

Agree that any further reasonable costs required to develop the proposal be approved in accordance with existing officer delegations.

In accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework Rules a vote on the Amendment was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:-

For the Amendment – Councillors Bartch, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Henderson, Holroyd, Keir, Lawley, Lee, Marshall, K Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Mrs. Scott, Snedker, Tostevin, Walker, Walters (20)

Against the Amendment – The Mayor, Councillors Allen, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Cossins, Crumbie, Curry, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Johnson, Layton, Mahmud, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M Nicholson, Porter, Ray, Roche, Storr, Toms, Wallis (25)

Amendment Lost.

Another Amendment was moved by Councillor Henderson, and seconded by Councillor Snedker:

Further to the increased position on reserves from what was presented to scrutiny I propose that the increase in Council Tax be changed to 4.49%. This brings Council tax down to an increase nearer inflation.

In accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework Rules a vote on

the Amendment was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:-

For the Amendment – Councillors Bartch, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Henderson, Holroyd, Keir, Lawley, Lee, Marshall, K Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Mrs. Scott, Snedker, Tons, Tostevin, Walker, Walters (21)

Against the Amendment – The Mayor, Councillors Allen, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Cossins, Crumbie, Curry, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Johnson, Layton, Mahmud, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M Nicholson, Porter, Ray, Roche, Storr, Wallis (24)

Amendment Lost.

The Substantive Motion was then put to the meeting. In accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework Rules a vote on the recommendation was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:-

For the Motion – The Mayor, Councillors Allen, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Cossins, Crumbie, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Johnson, Layton, Mahmud, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M Nicholson, Porter, Ray, Roche, Storr, Toms, Wallis (25)

Against the Motion – Bartch, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Henderson, Keir, Lawley, Lee, Marshall, K Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Mrs. Scott, Snedker, Tostevin, Walker, Walters (19)

Abstentions – Councillor Holroyd (1)

Motion Carried.

RESOLVED –

(a) That the response and comments received to the consultation be noted.

(b) That the Revenue MTFP, as set out in Appendix 6, and the Capital Programme, as set out in Appendix 7, be approved, including:

(i) A Council Tax increase of 2.99% plus a 2% Adult Social Care Precept for 2026/27;

(ii) The Schedule of Charges as set out in Appendix 3.

(c) That a delegation be approved for Cabinet to vary the Revenue budget for 2026/27 by up to £0.5m without further Council approval.

(d) That a delegation be approved for Cabinet to vary the Capital budget for 2026/27 by up to £0.5m without further Council approval.

Reasons – The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

(a) The Council must set a budget for the forthcoming financial year.

(b) To enable the Council to continue to plan services and finances over the medium term.

(c) To ensure decisions could be made in a timely manner.

(d) To ensure investment in the Council's assets was maintained.

90 SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX FOR 2026/27

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to setting this Council's Council Tax for 2026/2027, which was required to be set before 11th March 2026.

In accordance with the requirements of the Budget and Policy Framework Rules a vote on the recommendation was taken of those Members present at the meeting and there appeared:-

For the Motion – The Mayor, Councillors Allen, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Cossins, Crumbie, Curry, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Lawley, Layton, Mahmud, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M Nicholson, Porter, Ray, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Wallis (29)

Against the Motion - Councillors Bartch, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Lee, Marshall, K. Nicholson, Pease, Renton, Mrs. Scott, Tostevin, Walker, Walters (16)

Motion Carried.

RESOLVED –

(a) That the following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2026/27 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the relevant regulations:

(i) £304,455,736 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimated for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act, taking into account all precepts issued by Parish Councils, as its expenditure.

(ii) £229,824,530 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimated for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act, as its income.

(iii) £74,631,206 being the amount by which the amount at (i) above exceeded the amount at (ii) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax Requirement for the year.

(iv) £2,064.97 being the amount at (iii) above, divided by the Council Tax base calculated in paragraph 13 of the report, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of Council Tax for 2026/27 (including Parish Precepts).

(v) £292,736 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act, as set out in Appendix 1.

(vi) £2,056.87 being the amount at (iv) above, less the result of dividing the amount at (v) above by the Council Tax base, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act as the basic amount of Council Tax for dwellings in those

- parts of its area to which no Parish Precept related.
- (vii) That the basic Council Tax for 2026/27 for dwellings in those areas where Parish Precepts applied be as set out in Appendix 1, column 5.
- (viii) That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Act, set the aggregate amounts shown in Appendix 2 as the amounts of Council Tax for 2026/27 for each part of its area and for each category of dwelling.

(b) That it be noted that, for 2026/27, the Office of the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner had issued a precept to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Act, stating the following amounts for each category of dwelling:



(c) That it be noted that, for 2026/27, the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service had issued a precept to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Act, stating the following amounts for each category of dwelling:



(d) That the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Act, set the amounts set out in Appendix 3 as the amounts of Council Tax for 2026/27 for each category of dwelling.

Reasons –
To set the Council Tax for the Council’s area for 2026/27 in accordance with statutory requirements.

91 DARLINGTON CAPITAL STRATEGY 2026/27

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) to seek approval of the Council’s Capital Strategy for 2026/27.

The submitted report stated that the revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities 2024 required every Council to publish a Capital Strategy and review it annually. Members were reminded that, in accordance with these regulations, the Council had published its first Capital Strategy in 2019/20 and that the 2026/27 update was attached at Appendix 1.

It was reported that the revised Code placed greater emphasis on ensuring capital expenditure was prudent, proportional, affordable and sustainable, with an increased focus on the long-term implications of capital spending for the revenue budget and for the delivery of the Council’s policy objectives.

The submitted report stated that the Strategy provided an overview of how capital expenditure and financing decisions were taken, and set out the framework for the

development, management and monitoring of the Council's capital investment plans. Members were informed that the Strategy focused on the core principles underpinning the Council's four-year capital programme and the governance framework supporting it.

It was noted that the Strategy highlighted the resource streams available to the Council for capital financing and outlined the approach taken to risk management. Members were advised that the Strategy maintained strong alignment with the Council's wider priorities and key strategic documents, including the Treasury Management Strategy, the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the Council Plan.

RESOLVED – That the Capital Strategy for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved.

Reasons –

- (a) To provide a framework for capital investments.
- (b) To ensure the Council adopted the Prudential Code for Capital Finance 2024.
- (c) To enable the Council to invest in its assets.

92 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - MTFP FOR 2026-27 TO 2029-30

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) to enable Members to consider and approve proposals for the revenue budget, capital programme, rent levels and service charges for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2026–27, within the context of the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan to 2029–30 and the 30-year Business Plan, following consultation with Council tenants.

It was reported that Darlington Borough Council remained the largest provider of social housing in the Borough, managing 5,266 homes which continued to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Members were informed that a range of high-quality services were provided to tenants, including a responsive repairs and maintenance service, lifeline support and an emergency call-out provision. In addition to day-to-day maintenance, significant annual investment was made in the housing stock to maintain standards, improve energy efficiency, support tenants in reducing their energy bills, meet Government targets and progress the Council's ambitious new-build programme. Demand for Council housing remained strong, and Members noted that the new-build programme was funded through right-to-buy receipts, Homes England grant funding and estimated borrowing of £8.2m.

It was also noted that the HRA funded a Tenancy Sustainment Service to provide tenants with advice and practical support, including assistance with welfare benefits, Universal Credit transition, budgeting, access to reduced-tariff utilities, and referrals for independent financial advice, food parcels and recycled furniture.

Members were advised of the key financial decisions for 2026–27, including proposed revenue expenditure of £31.986m, incorporating £7.455m for responsive repairs and maintenance and £12.261m to support the capital programme. The proposed capital programme totalled £22.119m and included heating replacements, adaptations, structural

and external works, window and door replacements, kitchen and bathroom renewals, energy-efficiency measures, and schemes previously approved as well as the continuation of the new-build programme.

It was highlighted that the central decision each year was the balance between affordable rents and the need to invest in the housing stock, meet climate and regulatory obligations, and maintain services. Councils could increase rents by CPI plus 1%, and with CPI at 3.8% for September 2025, Members considered an increase of up to 4.8%. Members were reminded that a 2.7% increase had been applied in 2025–26, which was the maximum permitted that year and in line with other social landlords nationally.

It was noted that pressures arising from increased building materials and contractor costs had significantly impacted repairs, maintenance and new build programmes, with repairs rising by 50% between 2021–22 and 2024–25. In addition, substantial investment would be required to meet Government energy-efficiency targets, with approximately 2,350 properties below EPC rating C and estimated to require £32m of works by 2030. The Council had successfully secured £3.5m through the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund Wave 3, enabling upgrades to around 1,000 homes over the next three years, although further investment would still be required.

Members were informed of further pressures arising from forthcoming Decent Homes Standards, new Consumer Standards introduced in April 2024, the requirements of Awaab's Law regarding damp and mould, and Fire Safety regulations requiring replacement of doors in blocks of flats and communal housing schemes. Taking into account both the financial pressures and the need to maintain affordability for tenants, an increase of 4.8% for 2026–27 was recommended, alongside service charge increases aligned with expected costs. Cabinet had considered and endorsed the proposals on 3 February 2026.

RESOLVED – That Council be recommended to approve:

- (a) that an average weekly rent increase of 4.8% for 2026–27 be implemented, giving an average social rent of £89.92 and affordable rent of £101.95;
- (b) that garage rents and service charges be increased as set out in Table 3;
- (c) that the revenue budget at Appendix 1 be approved;
- (d) that the Housing Business Plan at Appendix 2 be agreed;
- (e) that the capital programme at Appendix 3 be approved and released; and
- (f) that the Executive Director of Resources and Governance be given delegated powers to proceed with new build schemes and property acquisitions using the funding identified at paragraph 22 of the report.

REASONS –

- (a) To enable the Council to deliver an appropriate level of housing services to tenants.

(b) To ensure housing need in the Borough continued to be met.

(c) To support the economic growth of the Borough through the development of new Council housing.

93 PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2026/27

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that Members review and approve the Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2026/27 to 2028/29, the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement, the Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27, and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2026/27.

It was reported that the document set out the Council's prudential indicators for the forthcoming three-year period and the expected treasury operations to support the delivery of the capital programme. Members were advised that the report fulfilled key legislative and professional requirements, including the duty to publish prudential indicators in line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice, the requirement to set out the Council's policy on Minimum Revenue Provision, and the duty to agree a Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy each financial year.

Members noted that the prudential indicators detailed the expected capital expenditure and the associated borrowing needs, together with treasury management indicators intended to provide assurance that treasury activity would be affordable, prudent and sustainable.

Particular reference was made to the authorised limit, which represented the maximum level of borrowing that the Council could afford in the short term, although this level would not be sustainable over the longer term. The investment strategy set out the criteria for selecting counterparties for investments and the controls in place to limit exposure to the risk of loss.

It was reported that the Council's expenditure plans, treasury management activities and prudential borrowing proposals were all within the statutory framework, consistent with the relevant professional codes of practice, and formed an integral part of both the Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans.

During consideration of the report, the relevant Portfolio Holder proposed an amendment to paragraph 81 of the Treasury Management Strategy. The Portfolio Holder advised that, in order to ensure the Council did not miss out on potential opportunities that could benefit the authority, a further borrowing option should be added to the list of approved sources. It was therefore proposed that a fourth option be inserted at paragraph 81(d) to read: *"Community Municipal Investment (bond or loan) with the lender being citizens."*

Members were informed that, as with all borrowing sources, this option would only be used if it provided the best value for the Council at the time of borrowing.

RESOLVED – That Council be recommended to approve:

(a) the Prudential Indicators and limits for 2026/27 to 2028/29 as summarised in

Tables 1 and 2;

(b) the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement set out in paragraphs 39 to 48;

(c) the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29 as summarised in paragraphs 52 to 82, including the amendment at paragraph 81 to insert a further borrowing option relating to Community Municipal Investments; and

(d) the Annual Investment Strategy 2026/27 contained in paragraphs 83 to 115.

REASONS –

(a) To comply with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and statutory guidance on investments and Minimum Revenue Provision.

(b) To meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003.

(c) To approve a framework within which officers could operate when undertaking treasury management and investment activity.

94 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026/27

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) presenting the Council's Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2026/2027, in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2014, and requesting approval of the Policy.

It was reported that the Localism Act required the Council to agree a written Pay Policy Statement on an annual basis and to publish specific information relating to the remuneration of the Council's highest- and lowest-paid employees.

Members were informed that the proposed Pay Policy for 2026/2027, attached at Appendix A, met all legislative requirements and associated guidance, and would be published on the Council's website to ensure full transparency once approved.

RESOLVED – That Council be recommended to agree and approve the Pay Policy 2026/2027 (Appendix A), and that arrangements be made for the Policy to be published on the Council's website for public access.

REASONS –

(a) To enable the Council to comply with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.

(b) To ensure openness and transparency in relation to the Council's approach to pay.

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COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

CONSTITUTION UPDATE

Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve changes to the Council's Constitution.

Summary

2. The changes are proposed in order to better facilitate the work of the Council and provide additional clarification to the existing Council Procedure Rules.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The updates and changes to the Constitution, as detailed in this report, be approved.
 - (b) The Monitoring Officer be delegated to update the Constitution to reflect the changes identified.

Reasons

4. The recommendations are supported to ensure that the Constitution is clear, accurate, up-to-date and fit for purpose.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director of Resources and Governance

Background Papers

The Constitution of the Council

Amy Wennington: Extension 5490

Council Plan	An up to date and clear Constitution should contribute to the decision making and governance arrangements and help members and officers to deliver the Council plan.
Addressing inequalities	There is no direct impact on inequality.
Tackling Climate Change	There is no impact on climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Improving the clarity of the Constitution will help with efficiency
Health and Wellbeing	There are no direct issues relating to Health & Wellbeing.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no direct impact on Crime and Disorder.
Wards Affected	There will be no direct impact on any particular ward.
Groups Affected	There will be no direct impact on any particular group.
Budget and Policy Framework	Amendments to the Constitution need to be approved by Council.
Key Decision	This is not an Executive Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Executive Decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. The Council's Constitution prescribes the framework for Council decision making and the procedures that are followed.
6. Some updating of the Constitution is needed from time to time as a matter of good housekeeping, and to ensure that the Constitution remains up-to-date and fit for purpose.

Council Procedure Rules relating to the asking of questions

7. Currently, elected members are able to ask questions at Council Meetings where one clear working day's notice in writing has been given and members of the public are able to ask questions at Council Meetings where 24 hours' notice in writing has been given. Due to a notable increase in the number of questions being submitted to these meetings, these tight deadlines are no longer practicable, and it is therefore recommended that the deadline for all questions on notice, from both elected members and members of the public, be extended to two clear working days prior to the meeting.
8. A clear working day is defined as a complete period of 24 hours, excluding weekends and bank holidays. The day that the question is delivered does not count and neither does the day of the meeting. By way of example, as our ordinary Council meetings are generally held at 6pm on a Thursday, questions would need to be submitted no later than the Monday before such a meeting in order to be accepted, if a two clear working days deadline were to be implemented.
9. It is therefore recommended that paragraph 15 of the Council Procedure Rules be amended as follows:

*'A question may only be asked if **two clear working days**' notice (that is not counting the day of the meeting or the day of delivery or weekends and bank holidays) has been given by delivering the question in writing or by electronic mail to Democratic Services. Each question must give the name and address of the questioner and must name the Member of the Council to whom it is to be put.'*

10. At the Council Meeting held on 29 January 2026, Members resolved to amend paragraph 13 of the Council Procedure Rules relating to questions from Members of the Public to read:

*'Any person can ask a question of the Leader, Members of the Cabinet, or the Chair of a Committee at Ordinary, Extraordinary and Special meetings of the Council. **Questions submitted for Special or Extraordinary meetings must directly relate to a matter appearing on the Agenda.***

11. The rationale behind this change was that, as Special Meetings and Extraordinary Meetings are called for a specific purpose, it is an acknowledged practice that questions will only be accepted if they relate to an item on the Agenda for that meeting, however this had previously caused confusion for Members of the Public who were not aware of this practice and had stated that this should be explicit within the Constitution. The Constitution has now been amended, following the resolution at January's Council Meeting, to make this expressly clear.
12. Following January's meeting however, it has been acknowledged that it is not explicit within the Constitution that this same principle is expected to apply to questions from elected members too and therefore, for the avoidance of doubt, it is proposed that paragraph 51 of the Council Procedure Rules be amended as follows:

*'Members may ask the Mayor or a Cabinet Member a question which is relevant to the Council's powers or duties, or which affects the Borough in some way. A question may only be asked if **two clear working days**' notice (that is not counting the day of the meeting or the day of delivery or weekends and bank holidays) has been given by delivering the question in writing or by electronic mail to Democratic Services. The question must name the Member of the Council to whom it is to be put. Questions submitted for Special or Extraordinary meetings must directly relate to a matter appearing on the Agenda.'*

13. This change would make the position regarding questions from Members at Special and Extraordinary Council Meetings expressly clear, as well as encompassing the recommended deadline change from 24 hours to two clear working days.

Dealing with Amendments to Motions

14. When an amendment to a Motion is moved without notice during a meeting and that amendment has financial implications for the Council it is good practice to give Officers prior notice of that amendment, as Officers may not be able to give comprehensive timely advice during a Council meeting.
15. Making decisions that financially impact the Council without allowing time for Officers to properly consider the outcome and advise Members accordingly is therefore not advisable. For that reason, it is recommended that an additional paragraph be added to the "Method

of Dealing with Amendments”, which appears at paragraphs 60 to 69 of the Council Procedure Rules. That paragraph would read as follows:

‘If an amendment has financial implications for the Council, notice of it must be served, in writing, on the Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer at least three clear working days (that is not counting the day of the meeting or the day of delivery or weekends and bank holidays) before the meeting. The amendment will not be accepted as valid, and will therefore be disregarded, if less than three clear working days’ notice has been given of it being moved or if the Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, does not consider it to be deliverable and in accordance with the Council’s statutory obligations.’

Proper Officer roles

16. Following the senior management restructure agreed by Council on 24 September 2024, internal restructuring and organisational changes have taken place. As a result, some amendments are required to address appointments to the Proper Officer roles pertaining to the Building Act 1984. As Building Control sits within the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection’s area of responsibility, they should be the Proper Officer in relation to sections 61, 78(8) and 93 of the Building Act 1984.

Code of Conduct for Employees

17. During a review of the Code of Conduct for Employees, it has been noted that the document contains some references to old job titles. It is therefore recommended that any reference to the Managing Director within this document be updated to Chief Executive and any reference to the Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be updated to the Executive Director for Economy and Public Protection.

COUNCIL
26 March 2026

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.

Darlington Northern Link Road

3. As part of the Transport in City Regions (TCR) 2027-2032 funding allocated for this scheme, TVCA are continuing to develop an updated Options Assessment Report – this will also pick up the new guidance in the recently updated HM Treasury Green Book about the type of options to take forward. Once completed it will enable consideration of the next steps.

Darlington Station

4. The delivery of the Darlington Station project continues to progress and is planned to open in Spring 2026. The associated highways work on both sides is awaiting final approval and will be programmed to minimise the impact to the operational running of the station and car park.

Tees Valley Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Supported Bus Services

5. Currently, the BSIP funding for 2025/26 is being used to deliver elements of the Tees Valley BSIP plan including fares offers, improving customer experience and supporting a number of services which are contracted until 31 March 2026.
6. BSIP funding has been replaced by a new Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) and it has been confirmed that TVCA will receive a multi-year funding allocation of £25,988,194 for the period 2026/27 to 2028/29. This is the equivalent of £8,662,728 per annum - an increase from the £7,278,668 allocated in 2025/26. This multi-year settlement provides longer-term funding certainty and enables TVCA, Local Authorities and bus operators, via the Enhanced Partnership to plan further ahead.
7. In anticipation of this funding, and in light of the withdrawal of Tees Flex from the network from March 2026, TVCA are currently carrying out a review of all our current service enhancements. Following a data collection and analysis exercise on proposals put forward

for Supported Bus Services from the 25-26 BSIP funding and the requests for interventions TVCA have received over the last year, a long list of potential services and service enhancements has been developed, this will form proposals of which will move forward for approval.

8. Until this review has concluded, and to keep disruption to passengers at a minimum, TVCA have confirmed the following services have been extended in Darlington until July 2026:
 - (a) Service 16 (Darlington) – to be operated by Arriva
 - (b) Services 17/18 (Darlington) – to be operated by Arriva
 - (c) Services 3&4, evening and Sunday extension (Darlington) – to be operated by Arriva
 - (d) Services 6/6A (Darlington & Stockton) – to be operated by Stagecoach
9. In addition, from April 2026, an extension of the current Arriva commercial service 10 from Whinfield in Darlington, will now travel once an hour via Great Burdon, Sadberge, Little Stainton, Bishopton, Redmarshall, Carlton, Thorpe Thewles, Stillington and Great Stainton in an anticlockwise loop, returning to Sadberge and rejoining Service 10 at Whinfield.
10. Residents of Bishopton will also be able to travel to Stockton via new supported service Service X85 which will connect Redmarshall, Whitton, Stillington and Bishopton to Roseworth Tesco, University Hospital of North Tees and Stockton High Street. The service will also connect Great Stainton at a reduced frequency whilst covering key commuter travel demands. This service will also start in April 2026.

Supporting the decarbonisation of the bus fleet - Arriva Darlington Depot

11. Infrastructure works commenced in December 2025, and 21 Wrightbus Electric Buses have been ordered which are anticipated to enter in service from September 2026. This timeline has slipped from the original June 2026 date due to unforeseen complications with the power connection.

Great British Railway Bill

12. The Railways Bill will make provision to enable the creation of Great British Railways (GBR) and will create a statutory duty for Mayoral Strategic Authorities to have greater local influence over decision-making on the railway and shape rail outcomes in their regions. The intention is for the Bill to receive Royal Assent in Summer 2026. GBR is expected to be operational around twelve months after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Active Travel

13. The Northgate Levelling Up Fund scheme which improves cycle connectivity from East Street to St. Cuthberts Way is now fully designed with a business case due to be appraised shortly. Works are expected to start on site in June 2026.

14. Woodland Road Phase 2 is also fully designed, and the business case has been approved following appraisal. Works expected to start on site around Easter 2026.

Climate Change

15. The Climate Change Working Group has now been renamed to Climate Change and Nature Restoration Cross Party Working Group, to incorporate the addition of the Nature Restoration work. The group met on 6 February and had updates from officers covering both areas. Members also heard about the recent publication of the Warm Homes Plan and government response to heat network zoning. We are now waiting on legislation to see exactly how that will impact on us.

Corporate Peer Challenge

16. In line with best practice, the council asked the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), and this took place at the start of March 2026. The CPC team included senior politicians and senior officers from a range of local authorities, and focused on six themes; local priorities and outcomes, organisational and place leadership, governance and culture, financial planning and management, capacity for improvement, and ambition for place and ways of working. The CPC team interviewed a broad range of staff, councillors and external partners with the aim of achieving a broad understanding of the council in line with the six themes. The council will receive a CPC report in the near future and will develop an action plan based on the recommendations it contains.

External Meetings and Engagement

17. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are some of the meetings and events I have attended:
 - (a) Pride in Place Board
 - (b) Citizenship Ceremonies
 - (c) Formal opening of Martin Brower distribution centre
 - (d) Deputy Chief Constable Ciaron Irvine
 - (e) Briefing with the Police and Crime Commissioner
 - (f) Various Cabinet and Transport meetings at the TVCA
 - (g) LGA Engagement Workshop
 - (h) Introductory meeting with new Lord Lieutenant Michael Butterwick
 - (i) All Member Briefings – Events Programme 2026 and Inclusive Recovery Cities
 - (j) Transport for the North Board
 - (k) Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board
 - (l) Beaumont Hill Academy Launch

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council

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COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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 requests for service in Quarter 3 2025/2026. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food 107
 - (b) Licensing 103
 - (c) Noise 177
 - (d) Planning Enquiries 91
 - (e) Refuse 56
 - (f) Pests 171
 - (g) Personal searches 114
3. Environmental Health has partnered with Public Health and Childcare Development to launch an enhanced Healthy Early Years (HEY) Award, supporting early years settings to promote healthier lifestyles for children across Darlington. The expanded award now brings together three key areas of child wellbeing: nutrition, physical activity, and oral health. To assist settings in meeting the new standards, a comprehensive guidance document has been published, offering practical advice, local examples of effective practice, and links to relevant services and resources. The updated HEY Award will be assessed by the Food Safety Team as part of routine food hygiene inspections, ensuring a consistent and supportive approach to improving health outcomes for young children.
4. A new air quality monitor for PM2.5 (particulate matter) has been installed on the recreational ground off Fenby Avenue, the monitor is an urban background monitor and part of the Automatic Urban and Rural Network which is run by Defra. Once operational the monitoring results will be available on the UK Air website.

Climate Change

5. We have been taking part in local discussions around developing regional energy strategic plans. These are a government requirement on the National Energy System Operator to inform network investment by the distribution network operators (DNOs). We have also been supporting the Local Area Energy Plans being drawn up by the consultants employed by TVCA. Our participation in both of these ensures that Darlington is not left behind in any future energy system planning.
6. We are also in discussion with the local resilience forum to determine how we measure the costs to the council and to Darlington as a whole, of severe weather events. This will

include an indication of where the worst impacts are being felt. If we can do this robustly, it will enable us to target interventions and, hopefully, help to reduce future insurance claims (and subsequent rises in premium).

7. The Climate Change Officer is now qualified to deliver Carbon Literacy training. She is offering teams bespoke training sessions. If Members would like her to deliver a session for Members, we can arrange that.
8. The Ecologist has almost completed work on the statutory biodiversity duty report, which must be submitted before the end of March. She is also working on the nature restoration action plan. She is continuing to work on our approach to dealing with biodiversity net gain alongside responding to planning applications.

Building Control

9. Building Regulations applications and works are progressing as normal, no issues to be reported. The large Brunswick Street office development has commenced with initial drainage and piling works underway. Building Control have undertaken initial commencement inspections at the site and continue to work with the contractor Kier regarding the Building Control application.
10. The BSR audit inspection is now complete, with a report issued to DBC. This included several areas highlighted for review and address. Much work and resources have been dedicated to drawing up an action plan since it was issued in late November. All identified actions have been implemented, with relevant information reported back to BSR.
11. Preparation for the introduction of the government's Building Safety Levy continues at pace. The Building Control team are taking every opportunity to learn more about the expectations from MHCLG. This may take up further, considerable resource from the Building Control service. MHCLG have confirmed a burdens fund will be available in relation to the introduction of the levy which may need to be explored further. It has been suggested that this may need to be used to cover employee resource to administer the levy collection process, along with IT systems and software to record and report details of levy collection. We await further details and guidance and take every opportunity available to gain further understanding of the expectations.
12. Regarding dangerous structures:
 - (a) Working together with Environmental Health, we continue to monitor the situation with Northgate House and take any action necessary under The Building Act.
 - (b) It has been noted that work has been instigated to demolish Valley House and this is now an active demolition site. The dangerous structure file on this property is now closed.
 - (c) General: We have noted a steady influx of minor dangerous structure reports so far this year. This is in stark contrast to the start of the previous year, where a rapid influx of reports in relation to winter storms were reported. This winter appears to have been much calmer so far. We continue to deal with any reports accordingly, in

relation to Building Control involvement, ensuring safety of the public within the borough.

Development Management

13. Following the granting of planning permission for infrastructure to support drone delivery flights from the Amazon in October 2025, initial drone testing in connection with Amazon's Prime Air programme commenced on site in January 2026. This includes take-off and landing within the site, together with maintenance check flights, where drones follow pre-programmed routes beyond the site before returning to it, although no customer deliveries will be made at this stage.
14. The testing period forms part of the time limited planning permission which relates to the Sandbox testing period only to allow the impact of noise from drone flights to be monitored and for data gathered during this testing period to be used as an evidence base for the Secretary of State to develop noise policy and to inform future statutory guidance for BVLOS drone operations to be rolled out nationally for this technology.
15. Officers from Planning and Environmental Health will continue to work closely with Amazon and their representatives during this testing period as they move towards submitting a further planning application for full Prime Air operations in due course. In accordance with the planning conditions attached to the time limited planning permission, Amazon are reporting any noise complaints on a monthly basis. To date none have been received.
16. Work continues on the new Treasury building on Brunswick Street following the granting of planning permission. Site preparation and infrastructure works started towards the end of 2025 with the main construction works following on.
17. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development continue to increase with most reports resolved without the need to resort to formal enforcement action. Members are updated on the more significant or urgent cases where investigations are ongoing confidentially at the Planning Applications Committee each month. There has been an increase across the Borough in unauthorised signage recently, both within the town centre and other concentrations of commercial properties across the town. Given the number of unauthorised signs in place, the Enforcement Team has been targeting signs in the most sensitive locations i.e. listed buildings, conservation areas, and others where complaints have been received.
18. Recently enforcement notices have been served on a number of properties to secure removal of unauthorised signage where this hasn't been possible through negotiation. This has resulted in a generally positive response with signage having already been removed or a commitment given to comply with the notices. The team will continue to secure compliance with these notices and continue to investigate other unauthorised signage as resources allow.

Business Investment

19. The main areas of enquiries for business growth and business start-up has been the hospitality and personal services sector.

20. In February 2026, Darlington Jobs Fair, a major recruitment event hosted by Darlington Borough Council, designed to connect jobseekers, career changers, and students with local and national employers was held. Whilst traditionally held at the Dolphin Centre, this fair was hosted at the Darlington Indoor Market Hall. With a broad industry representation, the event featured over 60 exhibitors, including Darlington Building Society, Zigup, Lidl, Paralloys, Willmott Dixon, CPI, Kier Construction and the Darlington Economic Campus, as well as Darlington Council. Opportunities available ranged from entry-level positions and apprenticeships to management roles in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, logistics, retail, and the civil service. In addition, a number of support organisations like National Careers Service, Mind, Enterprise Made Simple, TVCA and Jobcentre Plus were on hand to provide advice and guidance, and educational providers like Darlington College and Learning & Skills attended to discuss upskilling and further education courses.
21. The Business Investment Team attended the Tees Valley Supply Chain Showcase on 12 February 2026, which brought together regional businesses, major project leads, investors, and public-sector partners to highlight the scale of economic opportunity emerging across the Tees valley. The event focused on strengthening local supply-chain capability and ensuring that firms across the region—particularly SMEs—are well-positioned to benefit from the region’s expanding industrial and clean-energy sectors. Key themes discussed included major investment pipeline, supply chain readiness, skills and workforce development, innovation and diversification.
22. Officers have been working with our Tees Valley local authority peers to develop and deliver a "Business Masterclass Programme", a structured series of high-quality workshops, expert-led sessions, and practical learning opportunities designed to help local businesses improve productivity, adopt new technologies, scale up, and build long-term resilience. Funded by TVCA, the programme forms part of the region’s wider business-support ecosystem and is delivered in partnership with local authorities, universities, and specialist providers. The Business Team are promoting Darlington businesses to participate.
23. Officers have supported Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and TVCA with the delivery and application appraisals of the Tees Valley Export Support Programme, a £600,000 regional initiative designed to help businesses across Tees Valley start exporting or expand their existing overseas activity. The programme is designed to help Tees Valley firms overcome common barriers to exporting—such as cost, compliance, and market access—and to ensure that local products and services can compete on the global stage. A number of Darlington businesses have been supported through this scheme.

Planning Policy

24. Consultation on Victoria Embankment and West End Conservation Area Appraisals has now concluded. A report will be prepared for a subsequent Cabinet and Council meeting with recommendations for adoption.

25. The Local Plan Review is now undergoing a 6 week consultation period. A report will be prepared summarising all the comments received and recommending modifications before a further round of consultation later in the year.
26. Work is on-going on the Homes Strategy and Action Plan and a report will be prepared for the April or May Cabinet.

Estates & Property

27. As reported to Cabinet on 3 March, the Council's Town Centre Development Partner Cityheart are progressing the Council's proposals for the STEM centre and finalising the proposed Development Agreement.
28. Infrastructure works at Burtree Garden Village which includes the Council's land have been hampered recently by the bad weather but are expected to pick up pace again as the weather improves. We still await a decision on the reserved matters planning application for cells L, M & O together with a decision on the detailed planning application for Cell CH.
29. Further to the approval by Cabinet in February regarding the Cummins option agreement, solicitors are now instructed and Cummins have recently submitted a planning application for their proposed expansion plans on Council land at Salters Lane South.
30. Proposals for the Council's land at Coniscliffe Road are continuing and a planning application is anticipated within a few months.

Towns Fund

31. The Towns Fund project board, which is comprised of relevant officers, is responsible for the oversight of the delivery of the remaining Towns Fund projects as defined by the Neighbourhood Board.
32. The focus is on the remaining projects which are Edward Pease House, 156 Northgate, Skinnergate and the Yards and the Northern Echo Building.

STEM Centre

33. The release of the Growth Mission Fund allocation is dependent on the completion of a full Government 'Green Book' business case. The Council and Department of Business and Trade grant funding team are working closely together to achieve sign off of the business case in March 2026
34. Cabinet resolved at the meeting on March 3 to include the STEM Centre site as part of the Cityheart development agreement and to commission Cityheart to deliver the scheme. In the interim, the necessary professional service works are underway to progress to the submission of a planning application.
35. Design consideration and refinement. The agreed facility operator, Darlington College and the Council are engaging with businesses and the education network to fully understand their current and future requirements of the centre to inform the final design. This will continue throughout the preconstruction planning stage and will have the necessary focus

on engaging those disadvantaged communities as defined by the Pride In Place Programme.

Pride in Place

36. The first year of Pride In Place starts in April 2026. This current year has been about making preparations.
37. At its last meeting on February 4, 2026, the Neighbourhood Board considered:
- (a) The Regeneration Plan which was submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in November. Confirmation of the plan is expected imminently.
 - (b) The new guidance as the programme moves from Plan for Neighbourhoods to Pride in Place. In particular the increased focus on actions led by the community.
 - (c) How a small grants fund might be established
 - (d) Updates of the three projects currently underway, STEM Centre, Skerne Park Community Centre feasibility study and a youth engagement proposal”

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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

2. We have successfully recruited to a new Service Manager to join the Adult Social Care (ASC) Adult Leadership Team (ALT), interim arrangements are in place until they start on 13 April 2026.

Blue Badges

3. There is a continued stable position with Blue Badges. The calls are higher for January as it was forecasted that January would be a busy month for blue badge calls/enquiries due to blue badge renewals for this month. We undertook a blue badge campaign in November, promoting that applicants can renew their blue badge up to two months prior to their old one expiring, that did help.
4. Most of the blue badge renewal applicants needed the support of an advisor to help complete their blue badge renewal application. The months can vary depending on when applicant's badges expire some months can be higher than others. Customer services are currently experiencing some high volumes of new blue badge applications, but we are still within the Service Level Agreement (SLA).

Hospital Discharges

5. The Winter Initiative pilot started in November 2025 identifying ASC as the lead agency for admission to the intermediate care beds, resulting in earlier involvement, timely reviews and better outcomes and a 'Ticket Home' approach. Initial findings are positive with reduced use of spot purchased short break stay beds. The Rapid Intervention and Assessment Care Team (RIACT) capacity funded via the Better Card Fund (BCF) to manage the demand within this pilot.
6. We have experienced the highest hospital discharge pressure this year compared to previous years; 1,088 referrals since April 2025 compared with 1,030 in 2024/2025, and 933 in 2023/2024. This continued rise reflects a combination of system-wide factors, including higher acuity among patients presenting at hospital, seasonal pressures, and increased demand linked to population health needs. The impact has been particularly evident through winter, where hospitals have reported sustained bed pressures and a greater reliance on community services to support timely flow.

7. Despite this increased demand, the majority of people continue to be supported to return home safely wherever possible — 748 individuals as of Quarter 3. This reflects the success of the Winter Initiative pilot, earlier ASC involvement, strengthened partnership working in discharge planning, and the continued focus on strengths-based practice and community alternatives. These approaches are supporting improved outcomes, reducing reliance on short-term bed-based care, and enabling more people to regain independence at home.
8. An overnight support pilot was also started in November 2025. This is to enable consideration of return home with overnight care calls with the aim of reducing admission into short break stays and provide a further period of assessment. Initial data and cases are suggesting a positive uptake and reduction in need for bed based stays.

Permanent placements

9. Permanency admissions for older people aged 65+ have reduced from previous years with 111 admissions at Quarter 3 compared to 151 in 2024 / 2025 and 146 2023/2024. The teams have a proactive approach of high support and high challenge which has impacted this position positively.
10. Permanency admissions for working age adults aged 18-64 have also reduced from previous years with 9 admissions at Quarter 3 compared to 11 in 2024/2025 and 25 in 2023/2024. This has largely been as a result of working with providers and developing new models of accommodation in line with our commissioning needs.

Transformation

11. Our transformation programme continues to develop activity to manage increasing demands. Recent activity included; trusted assessment and electronic referrals to support our hospital discharges, utilising AI to capture conversations around safety planning and triage of safeguarding concerns, and amendments and roll our opportunities with Netcall telephony advancements.
12. The introduction of the Netcall telephony system has strengthened Adult Social Care's ability to manage demand by improving call flow, enhancing accessibility and ensuring a more consistent customer experience. The system's AI-enabled automation and unified communication tools streamline routine processes, reduce administrative burden and help staff respond more efficiently to enquiries. Its integrated reporting and analytics provide clearer insight into performance and demand trends, supporting better planning and service improvement. Netcall's flexibility and proven success in local government environments also enable rapid adaptation to operational pressures, contributing to a more responsive and resilient front-door service for residents.

Safeguarding (SG) and Deprivation of Liberty safeguards (DoLs)

13. Safeguarding contacts continue to increase across all teams, reflecting both rising levels of community need and greater awareness of safeguarding pathways. Of these contacts, 33.5% progress to strategy discussions, and each case is managed with robust oversight, clear professional scrutiny, and established governance processes to ensure that all concerns are assessed promptly, proportionately, and in line with statutory requirements.

14. Two care homes remain within our Executive Strategy Procedures (ESP) one being on phased admissions. ASC continue to work closely with system partners to support the providers to make required improvements against their action plans.
15. DoLS standard authorisation documentation is now received via a portal. Moving DoLS standard authorisation documentation onto a portal strengthens compliance and efficiency by ensuring applications are submitted in a consistent format, reducing delays linked to incomplete or incorrectly routed paperwork. It also provides a clear audit trail, improves information security, and enables faster allocation and processing by the DoLS team. This supports better oversight, timeliness, and statutory assurance in a high-risk area of practice.

Adult Learning Disability (ALD)

16. We have seen an increase in referrals, with a significant proportion coming through the Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) pathway as young people transition from Children's to Adults' Social Care. This rise reflects both growing levels of need and improved early identification and planning. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) continues to strengthen its Preparing for Adulthood offer by working closely with Children's Services, Education and health partners to ensure timely assessments, clear transition plans and consistent support for young people and their families. This joint approach provides assurance that increasing demand is being managed proactively, with a strong focus on independence, personalised planning and good outcomes into adulthood.

Social Work Practice

Working Age Adults Project with IMPOWER

17. IMPOWER is working in partnership with Darlington Borough Council's Adult Social Care service to deliver a major transformation programme focused on improving outcomes for Working Age Adults and strengthening financial sustainability. The approach combines detailed diagnostic work, behavioural insight and strengths-based practice, enabling the service to understand demand and cost drivers, benchmark performance, and identify priority groups who would benefit from more independence-focused pathways. This partnership was formally approved by Cabinet in December 2025 and is structured into clear phases: diagnostic, test-and-learn, and scale-up to ensure rigour and system-wide impact.
18. Early achievements include the identification of opportunities to reduce reliance on high-cost residential placements, trialling new interventions, and developing more personalised, preventative models of support. IMPOWER's methodology provides Adult Social Care with evidence-based insight and practical tools to embed sustainable change, with the project expected to deliver a minimum 3:1 return on investment, saving £0.25m in the first year and creating an estimated £0.75m in annual savings thereafter.

Commissioning and Contracts

19. Commissioning is continuing to work with Adults Services, Finance and Procurement colleagues to deliver its ambitious 2026/27 re-tendering programme. This consists of a

number of critical commissioned services including Day Opportunities, Direct Payments Support Service and Personal Care and Domestic Support in Extra Care settings. The programme will require a re-modelling of services to inform specifications, engagement surveys/events with potential future providers of these services and ending with formal evaluations leading to contract awards.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

20. The Partnership's Lead Safeguarding Partners Strategic Group and Management Group have not met in this reporting period. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 16 January 2026, the agenda focused on the delivery of the Family First Partnership reforms and the ICB's Strategic Transition Programme.
21. A presentation was provided by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) on its Strategic Transition Programme, which will see the ICB move from nine directorates to five. The impact of these changes on safeguarding teams and partnership working was discussed, with recognition of the challenges posed by the reduction in resources and the need for effective representation and attendance at partnership meetings. It was noted that while statutory duties will not change, the partners responsible for delivering them may do so, changes are intended to streamline with no planned transfer of statutory functions and the ICB will continue to work in partnership. The group noted the importance of retaining sight of statutory responsibilities and holding the ICB and other partners to account for any changes that may impact safeguarding, and there is a need to ensure that safeguarding, particularly for children, remains a priority in all documentation and planning. The need for clear communication and engagement with local partners was emphasised with an expectation having discussions prior to the implementation.

Adult Scrutiny

22. No comments

Councillor Anne-Marie Curry
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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.

Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

2. An Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) took place between 2nd and 13th February 2026. The Inspection involved a combination of off-site data and performance analysis and visits to Darlington by an Inspection team to judge the quality of children's services practice. As portfolio holder, I met with the lead inspector to discuss the progress we have made as a service. The Inspection leads to individual judgements of either Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate in the following domains;
 - (a) The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
 - (b) The experiences and progress of children in care
 - (c) The experiences and progress of care leavers
 - (d) The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families
 - (e) Overall effectiveness
3. At the time of writing the findings of Ofsted remain embargoed until they are published on 24th March 2026.

Tackling Child Poverty

4. On 11th February I attended the North East Child Poverty Commission as a board member, in Newcastle. We heard from Mairi Warrington from the Government's Child Poverty Unit, with an update on the new national child poverty strategy, 'Our Children, Our Future', following its publication on 5th December.
5. We looked at the scale of the challenge ahead – with 4.5 million UK children in relative poverty after housing costs and 2 million UK children in deep material poverty. The nature of the issue since the last time there was a national child poverty strategy has also changed, with a growth in poverty for larger families (3+ children); families where someone has a disability; and increasingly for families in work – alongside a growth in the depth of poverty experienced by children.
6. As far as children are concerned, the strategy highlights the impact of shame, stigma, exclusion from social activities, and that for many 'growing up in poverty means growing up too soon and dealing with adult-like worries and anxieties. Alongside the action points across Government, including increasing family income (e.g. ending the two-child limit; National Living Wage increases; free breakfast clubs), reducing the cost of essentials (e.g. expanding Free School Meals; expanding the Holiday Activity Fund scheme; and £39bn on the Social and Affordable Homes programme, there will be better local support some of

which is evidenced in this report – the new Best Start Family Hubs; Pride in Place programme; and the £1bn Crisis & Resilience Fund).

7. A representative of Tees Valley Combined Authority attended, and it was really good to hear that on the back of our meeting in January that I referenced in my previous report, the Commission will be focussing on the Tees Valley and how, with the necessary political will, we can replicate the success that Mayor Kim McGuinness has had in the North East Combined Authority in taking forwards the child poverty agenda.

Early Intervention and Front Door

8. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT), which forms part of the Children's Front Door, continues to operate as a stable and effective service. The team maintains a strong focus on relational practice while ensuring that children and families receive the right support at the right time and remain safe. CIAT is committed to achieving the best possible outcomes through timely and proportionate decision-making. Although the team receives a high number of contacts compared to statistical neighbours, the model promotes an effective partnership approach. A significant increase has been noted in police contacts resulting in a 'no further action' outcome; a deep dive is currently underway to understand this trend.
9. Recent performance data, audit findings, and feedback confirm that CIAT consistently facilitates appropriate service responses without delay. This reflects the team's ongoing efforts to ensure decisions are proportionate, unnecessary social care assessments are avoided, and safeguarding remains paramount. Work is scheduled for the New Year to undertake live call audits, ensuring the conversational model remains as effective as possible.
10. CIAT works collaboratively across the service to maintain a consistent focus on missing episodes for young people, regardless of where case responsibility lies. The team remains the strategic lead for children who go missing, with current priorities including the timely completion and quality of Return Home Interviews (RHIs), embedding this work into each child's plan. The Missing From Home Worker, previously commissioned by Barnardos, has now transferred into a permanent DBC post. This enables more flexibility particularly for children who may not live in Darlington but are in the North East as they are now offered an in-person missing from home interview.

Building Stronger Families Service

11. Significant progress is being made to ensure that McNay St is identified as a Best Start in Life Hub by end of March. Internal changes are being developed to guarantee that the hub includes a clinic room, breastfeeding facilities, and a food/clothes bank, which are all identified needs to be classified as a 'Hub'.
12. Multi agency meetings have been arranged and will commence imminently to ensure a holistic approach when mapping out service provision. Buy in from partner services has been integral and there is a real want to provide the best service for our families in the borough.
13. McNay Street Family Centre will transition to become the McNay Best Start in Life Family Hub, supported by additional Hubs across the Borough, referred to as 'spokes', which are

currently being identified. I have asked officers for an All-Member briefing to be arranged to bring Council colleagues up to speed with the Government's SEND reforms, and the Best Start in Life and Families First agendas.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service (YPEJS)

14. The management team continue to develop service provision on the back of the HMIP findings. The strategic board partners have oversight of the Post Inspection Action Plan, providing a level of scrutiny to monitor progress made.
15. The service has one young person in custody currently. He turns 18 shortly and as such, transition work is underway to ensure that the move from youth to adult services is seamless. This is supported by our seconded Probation Officer.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

16. There is a new Head of Service for this area, who commenced in post on 1st January 2026.
17. There has been a workstream completed focusing on ensuring where children are at risk of or experiencing harm outside the home their child exploitation matrix is reviewed and there has been an increase in timeliness in this area since this work was completed. The child exploitation pathway continues to be strengthened across the service and there is a clear understanding of children at risk of harm and actions being taken to reduce this harm.
18. Within the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams there has been a continued focus on assessment timeliness and statutory visits being completed in timescale. Team Managers now receive weekly performance reports which is starting to strengthen the work in this area and performance is starting to increase in timeliness with this higher level of focus but remains a targeted area of improvement.
19. Family Group Conferencing uptake continues to increase and families are now being allocated in a timely way following referral discussions taking place and the previous waiting list has now ended after the outcome of audit work led to small changes within service delivery. The changes in service delivery do not impact on families within the service or create delay.
20. There continues to be a Child in Need pilot team whereby non social workers hold children in need. This team is now staffed to capacity and audit work has shown the team provide good quality and timely support to families. We are now working towards expanding the remit of the team to pilot a Family Help model in line with the Families First Reforms to further test and understand the changes this will bring before wider implementations take place.

Looked After and Care Leaver information

21. We currently have 285 children in our care. This is a relatively static number with small areas of increase and decrease. We continue to experience significant challenges in finding homes for our children. This means we see more children entering residential care due to a lack of fostering families.

22. Our Children in our Care cohort is made up of 62 children living in care with friends or family, 45 in children's homes, 24 in supported accommodation, one in a pre-adoptive placement, 64 in in-house foster care, 58 in IFA foster care, 22 living with parents but looked after, one in a parent and child unit and four in unregistered or unregulated care. This is one child with complex disabilities living in an unregistered home and three children living with kinship carers who are not regulated.
23. We have a small number of children whose behaviour is challenging for others and they continue to struggle to have stability in their home. A weekly 'high risk' children meeting is in place chaired by the Head of Service to review those children we are most worried about and ensure they have the right support.
24. We currently support 131 care experienced adults aged 18+ and 69 16/17 year olds in the care leavers service. Over the next 12 months we want to explore how we can further strengthen our offer to care leavers and children in our care as corporate parents.

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

25. The government has announced a move towards regional fostering hubs completing end to end recruitment Initial discussions with Foster with North East are exploring how this will work for Darlington. This change will enable the in-house fostering team to focus on the support and retention of our current carers.
26. In Darlington we continue to offer a number of support groups such as for those carers who have babies and carers who care for teenagers. This enables carers to come together in supportive spaces to help each other.
27. During the February half term there were plans for a gaming afternoon, a soft play afternoon and coffee and cake session for our children and carers. This included children who foster. We also wanted to explore how we can further support children who foster as an organisation.

Homes for our Children

28. Cedars Childrens Home which was a short break and edge of care provision has now been amended to be a two bed mainstream children's home. Currently they care for one child whose needs mean other children cannot be matched alongside.
29. All children's homes have had 100% occupancy and one child has recently transitioned to a new home meaning we are actively exploring who could move into that bed.
30. Delays in opening Blossom have occurred due to issues with fire doors which are currently being rectified and we currently do not have a date for when Sherbourne will open. Recruitment is ongoing for a Responsible Individual to lead our children's homes.

Education

31. Polam Hall School was recently inspected by Ofsted. Inspectors recognised the vision of leaders that all pupils will flourish at Polam Hall. The school's personal development

programme has a considerable positive impact on pupils, and the impressive personal, social and health education programme ensures that pupils can reflect on world events and the experiences of others with maturity. Pupils' independence and confidence are developed at all stages of their school life, helping to make sure that pupils are ready for life after secondary school.

32. Work continues to be developed under the Darlington Inclusion Charter. With support from Shotton Hall Research School and a recently retired Darlington Headteacher the 'Everybody Talks in Darlington' project was launched in November 2025. An oracy (communication and spoken language) audit tool and talking toolkit have been co-produced. Training has been delivered on evidence based practice to support pupils' oracy skills. A further development session and training took place in February 2026, with more activity planned for the summer term.
33. Following an approach by the council, Zarach, the Children's Bed Charity, launched in Darlington in January. The charity takes referrals from schools and provides families experiencing bed poverty with a brand new bed, mattress and bedding to help them get a good night's sleep and a chance to thrive at school.

SEND Progress

34. On 13th March 2026 I attended the opening of Beaumont Hill College Academy, undertaken by Secretary of State the Rt. Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP. This now provides a dedicated 30-place setting for sixth-form students at Beaumont Hill, which in turn will create more spaces at Beaumont Hill's main setting. I was proud to be asked to say a few words in advance, as was our local MP Lola McEvoy. It was good to hear from Mike Butler, the Head of the Education Village Academy Trust just how positive they are for the practical support the Council has provided the Trust in delivering the scheme.
35. Together with the now-approved SEND Free School in Faverdale, the opening demonstrates the great strides we are making as far as SEND provision is concerned here in Darlington.
36. As portfolio lead, I attended the Schools Forum on 10th March 2026, the Let's Talk SEND parent/carers consultation event at the Hippodrome on 11th March 2026, and on 16th March 2026 held my regular catch-up meeting with leaders of Darlington's fantastic Parent Carer Forum.

HAF - Holiday Activities and Food Programme

37. The HAF programme (Holiday Activities and Food) is for children aged 5 – 16 who are eligible for benefits related free school meals. The programme ran over the Christmas holidays at venues across the town. Over 1900 places were made available and activities including trips to the Pantomime, Santa visits at Hopetown, The Polar Express, Raby Castle and Ice Skating as well as enrichment activities in the town including Swimming, Padel, Bowling and Sim King Gaming.

Youth Unemployment

38. The Darlington 18-24 claimant count has fallen slightly from 7.2% (540 young people) in September 2025 to 7.1% (530 young people) in December 2025, a fall of 0.1%.
39. Darlington at 7.1% is still higher than North-East average (6.2%) and National average (5.9%). In the same period the North-East average rose 0.1% and the England average both by 0.3%.
40. December 2025 figures for the Tees Valley show the claimant count for every authority with two authorities showing rising rates and three falling (September 2025 figures in brackets):
 - i. 8.7% (8.5%) Hartlepool
 - ii. 8.4% (8.8%) Stockton
 - iii. 8.0% (8.4%) Middlesbrough
 - iv. 7.4% (7.2%) Redcar & Cleveland
 - v. 7.1% (7.2%) Darlington

Darlington Employment Initiative (DEI)

41. The DEI programme is funded through UKSPF, with Hartlepool as the lead authority, 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). The programme started mid-February 2024 and will close on 31 March 2026.

Data to End of December 2025	16-24	25+	Total
Starts	138	116	254
Leavers	97	103	200
Leavers (into Employment)	51	67	118
Leavers (No Job)	46	36	82
On Programme	41	13	54

Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

42. 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. SBC is the lead authority for the Tees Valley and the main focus is getting young people out on work placements, both long-term paid and short-term un-paid.
43. The Trailblazer started in Darlington in September 2025 with a current contract until 31 March 2026, that is shortly to be extended to 31 March 2027, and to include 16 and 17 year olds. Work tasters have not proven popular with employers or young people. To date there are 16 young people on a six month placement and five on three month placements. There has been no take up of work tasters.

44. The team have engaged 59 employers 41 of which have expressed an interest in offering placements. Employers signed up to date are: Molson Group, Hiyed, Eric Knows, Hightech Industrial Access, The Dog Barn, Edward Robertson Ltd, Northern Heritage Engineering, Taurus Renewables, CL Construction, Tees Valley Community Church, Smart Homes, Secret Garden Ltd, Shape Café's, Baydale Beck, People Plus, Baltic, Learning A New Way, Aycliffe Filtration and Oxfam.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

45. As part of the Best Start in Life programme, EasyPeasy have been contracted (go live from the 1st April 2026) to provide a digital home learning environment via a bespoke app-based parent programme. The app has a strong evidence base in supporting a good level of development in children aged five and under. Parents and carers in Darlington will be able access expert guidance and practical support to help their child learn and develop at home. The app provides thousands of simple tips and play-based activities using everyday items and offers tailored personalised support helping with routines; including but not limited to; brushing teeth, mealtimes, sleep, communication, and early learning.
46. The strategic expansion of Darlington based supported accommodation for young people continues. From February 2026, there are an additional four units of self-contained accommodation available for Darlington young people provided by Tees Valley YMCA.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

47. The Partnership's Lead Safeguarding Partners Strategic Group and Management Group have not met in this reporting period. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 16 January, the agenda focused on the delivery of the Family First Partnership reforms and the ICB's Strategic Transition Programme.
48. The Family First reform discussion focussed on partnership working and the commitment to strengthening joint working in Darlington and any impact they may have on the integrated partnership arrangements. The Families First programme is designed to be a comprehensive, system-wide approach, focusing on early intervention and prevention, and ensuring that families are supported at the earliest possible stage. There was some nervousness expressed by Education colleagues as they are aware of issues being experienced in other partnership areas, these concerns were acknowledged and reference made to previous successful collaborative changes in Darlington. The reforms are underpinned by a commitment to partnership working, with an emphasis on shared responsibility and collaborative problem-solving across agencies. The group were assured that robust internal governance arrangements are in place and any risks associated with this transformation will be managed and monitored through a risk register, with oversight by the Program Board. The discussion also highlighted the importance of measuring impact and demonstrating the difference that the reforms are making. The need for clear and transparent reporting of outcomes was emphasised, as was the value of using data and evidence to inform decision-making and drive continuous improvement.
49. A presentation was provided by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) on its Strategic Transition Programme, which will see the ICB move from nine directorates to five. The impact of these changes on safeguarding teams and partnership working was discussed, with recognition of the challenges posed by the reduction in

resources and the need for effective representation and attendance at partnership meetings. It was noted that while statutory duties will not change, the partners responsible for delivering them may do so, changes are intended to streamline with no planned transfer of statutory functions and the ICB will continue to work in partnership. The group noted the importance of retaining sight of statutory responsibilities and holding the ICB and other partners to account for any changes that may impact safeguarding, and there is a need to ensure that safeguarding, particularly for children, remains a priority in all documentation and planning. The need for clear communication and engagement with local partners was emphasised with an expectation having discussions prior to the implementation.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Children and Young People Portfolio

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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

Health Squad

2. Following a period of mobilisation the new Darlington Health Squad Service will be fully operational in our communities from 1 April 2026.
3. The service will provide intensive outreach, engagement, holistic health and wellbeing assessments and support for people at greatest risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes, and those experiencing health inequalities due to social exclusion, multiple disadvantage, or systemic barriers to accessing healthcare.
4. The Health Squad team will deliver wellbeing interventions, offer appropriate onward referral to services and support and empower people most at risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes to make behaviour changes and access services to meet their needs. The service is based on a proven outreach-first model established in County Durham to tackle health inequalities and improve population health and wellbeing and will work in collaboration with the NHS and voluntary sector.
5. The aims of the service include:
 - a) Improved access to healthcare and wider support services amongst target groups.
 - b) Increased GP registration and engagement with preventative care.
 - c) Improved physical and mental health outcomes across a range of standardised tools/measures.
 - d) Reduction in A&E attendances for frequent attenders.
 - e) Stronger system-wide partnerships and feedback loops.

Healthy Hearts Bus

6. The Public Health team have been working collaboratively with Health Innovations North East and North Cumbria to host their “Healthy Hearts Bus” in a number of locations and venues in Darlington between 16 March 2026 and 20 March 2026, including community venues and public spaces, in order to reach people who may not otherwise attend their GP practice. The service offers a range of mini health checks which may indicate that people could benefit from lifestyle advice and guidance, or further medical investigations. Once final attendance has been collated, a more detailed update will follow. I am looking

forward to attending the Healthy Hearts Bus on 18th March and hope the programme can be repeated in the future.

7. Alongside the Healthy Hearts Bus, the sessions were supported by a number of Darlington organisations and services, including Health Trainers, Health Squad, Drug and Alcohol support team, Smoking Cessation team, and the 0-19 service, to offer a range of support and guidance to individuals.
8. In addition, staff raised awareness of the NHS Health Check service which is available every 5 years to all adults in Darlington aged 40-74 via their GP (with exemptions for certain pre-existing conditions).

Suicide Prevention

9. Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training was identified as a key deliverable by the Suicide Prevention Partnership. A procurement process has been undertaken to identify a suitable training provider, with an expectation of contract commencement in April 2026. The provider will be confirmed after the standstill period has ended.
10. The training aims to raise awareness of the signs that someone may be experiencing crisis, to support people to know how to open difficult conversations and to build confidence in responding to a disclosure that someone is considering taking their life.
11. Training will be offered to members of the suicide prevention partnership, partner organisations working with those at increased risk, elected members and council employees, as well as being made available to members of the Darlington community.

Best Start in Life Strategic Plan

12. Public Health are working in partnership with key partners to develop a Darlington Best Start in Life Strategic Plan. Partners include Family Hubs & Early Help and Education Teams at the Council, County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust and Harrogate and District Foundation Trust (who provide the health visiting and school nursing service in our Borough). Every Local Authority must develop a plan by 31 March 2026 as part of the Department of Education's 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy', to bring together early years and family services to improve child development and meet the government target of 75% of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. Overall, GLD in Darlington was 64.9% in 2024/25, however there are differences between cohorts including those children receiving Free School Meals, children with an Education and Health Care Plan, boys and children with English as a second language.
13. The local plan will include the development of a vision and targets in the following key areas:
 - a) Home Learning Environment and parenting interventions
 - b) Early Education and Care access and quality
 - c) Transition to School and Reception Year
 - d) SEND Support
 - e) Maternal and Early Years Services

Health and Wellbeing Board

14. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 19 March 2026. The main discussion items included the Neighbourhood Health Plan, Director of Public Health Annual Report and Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2024/2025.
15. Other issues considered at the meeting included a review of the Terms of Reference for the Board and the Child Death Review Process for County Durham and Darlington Annual Report 2024/25.

Housing Services

Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2025-26

16. The annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey results for our Council tenants have just been received and show continued high satisfaction across most areas for our Council Housing Services, and well above the latest national benchmarking figures.

Description	National Benchmark	2024/25 DBC results	2025/26 DBC Results
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord	68%	79%	77%
Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service	71%	84%	82%
Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair	68%	83%	82%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained	68%	82%	79%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe	74%	85%	82%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	57%	70%	66%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them	68%	76%	75%
Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect	74%	82%	83%
Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling	32%	35%	42%

Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	63%	71%	70%
Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	61%	66%	68%
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Darlington Borough Council's Housing Service's approach to handling anti-social behaviour?	56%	59%	58%

17. Analysis of the data is currently being undertaken, and these results will be shared with our Tenants Panel, who will lead on improvement actions in 2026-27. Additional questions were also asked of respondents, in relation to issues raised on the previous satisfaction survey around tenants' views for Housing Service can prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the community and how we can improve complaints handling.

A National Plan to End Homelessness

18. In December 2025, the Government launched their National Plan to End Homelessness, including 5 "pillars" that Local Authorities are being asked to work toward, as follows:
- (a) Universal Prevention (housing supply, tenancy security, income and allocations).
 - (b) Targeted Prevention (duty to collaborate, targets to prevent homelessness from institutions, such as care or prison).
 - (c) Preventing Crisis (funding, early detection, legal support).
 - (d) Emergency Response (mitigating the impacts of homelessness, such as temporary accommodation and child welfare).
 - (e) Recovery and Stability (non-recurring) (rough sleeping, support services).
19. The priorities in our local Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy meets the Governments key aims around homelessness and rough sleeping, and our Housing Services team are working with partners through the Homelessness Forum, to ensure our strategy delivers the outcomes contained within the national plan.

Allocations

20. The number of residents on the Council's housing waiting list continues to show encouraging signs of improvement. The number of households on the housing register at the end of January 2026 was 1,955. Whilst still high, this compares to a peak in March 2025 of 2,133. However, included in the current figures are 1,274 households whose current home meets their housing needs (band 4), meaning that the number of households in priority housing need is 681.
21. Most encouraging is the reduction in households in the most urgent housing need (band 1), which is currently 132. This compares to a peak of 310 in October 2024. In particular, the number of households on the housing register who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness is 83, a 45 per cent reduction since the start of 2025-26.

Tenancy Enforcement

22. Our Housing Services Tenancy Enforcement team continues to engage with Council tenants to obtain feedback on how anti-social behaviour impacts them directly, their family and community, and how we can work together to resolve issues in a timely manner. The team have been holding focus groups within areas where we have recognised repeated reports and higher numbers of anti-social behaviour and working with our partners in the Community Safety team and the local Police. This is helping us to review the way we work, handle complaints from our tenants, and shape our Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, which is due for review in 2026.
23. The team recently held a meeting with residents directly impacted by anti-social behaviour over a prolonged period. It was evident from this meeting that residents felt heard by holding a face-to-face meeting and reassured that we were there listening to them, and that this was a positive way of agreeing next steps in the ongoing case.
24. Over the last quarter we received 104 new cases, in comparison to 107 in the previous quarter. The main themes of the reported anti-social behaviour were verbal abuse and noise.

Tenant Involvement

25. In January, our Tenants Panel met and were asked what they would like to review in 2026. From this it was decided that over the next few months they would focus on our repairs service, solar panels and complaints. The panel also asked to be introduced to members of the Civic Enforcement and Street Scene teams.
26. The Housing Services Tenant Involvement team recently hosted an engagement day at Rise Carr, to find out from Council tenants in that area. A litter pick of the area was also carried out, and a skip was provided for residents to enable them to dispose of unwanted items from their home or garden.

Stock Condition Surveys

27. Housing Services has recently undertaken a project to undertake over 3,120 stock condition surveys on our Council homes. The Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards state that providers of social housing "must have an accurate record at an individual property level of the condition of their homes, based on a physical assessment of all homes and keep this up to date". Together with surveys previously undertaken, this means that 78 per cent of our Council homes currently have an up-to-date stock condition survey. A programme of work is currently being planned, to ensure we have a complete picture of our stock condition over the next 12 months.
28. In addition to this, Housing officers will be reviewing the stock condition data to understand how our properties are performing both for building components and energy performance. This will help us understand if key components, such as the roof, windows and doors are meeting their expected lifecycles and will be supported by repairs data, to help inform where our capital investments should be directed as part of our future Medium Term Financial Plans and the longer term 30-year business plan. The data will also be used to plan energy efficiency works in Council homes with an Energy Performance

Certificate (EPC) rating of below C.

Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund

29. Work has now commenced on our ambitious 3-year grant funded Warm Homes project, with REGEN as our contractor, to deliver over £14m worth of energy efficient upgrades to a proposed 680 Council homes. This will include cavity wall insulation, external wall insulation and loft insulation, along with other measures, such as low energy lighting, new doors and windows, and ventilation works. This will see upgrades to the Parkside, Lascelles, Skerne Park and Red Hall areas; we are currently working in Skerne Park with proposal to move to Red Hall over the summer months.

Awaab's Law

30. It has been 5 months since Awaab's law became effective. Awaab's Law is a legal requirement mandating social landlords to investigate and fix reported housing hazards, particularly damp and mould, within strict timeframes. Since then, our Housing Services team has implemented processes and developed ICT data recording systems, to ensure we are not only able to respond to those hazards and make our tenants homes safe but are also able to record this correctly and ensure no repairs get missed.
31. We have also been working with other providers and reviewing our benchmarking provider Housemark's data collection and reporting plans, to ensure we are able to provide visibility and transparency on our response and performance against these hazards. It is anticipated we will be able to provide fully validated information as part of our annual Compliance reporting for 2025-26. Initial data has shown that only 1.5 per cent of emergency hazards being reported are due to damp and mould, demonstrating the high quality of our Council homes.

Local Authority Housing Fund

32. I am pleased to announce that that Darlington Borough Council has been successful in securing £347.5k of Government funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund to increase the supply of temporary accommodation, the vast majority of which is those who are, or are at risk of homelessness. The funding will be used to acquire four additional family residential properties.
33. Two of the properties will be used for temporary accommodation, supporting our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, reducing the need to place families experiencing homelessness into inappropriate and expensive bed and breakfast accommodation. The other two properties will support the Government's Afghan Resettlement Programme, for those individual's and their families, who assisted the UK's military's efforts in Afghanistan and who had to leave Afghanistan following the change in regime.

Skinnergate New Build Housing Scheme

34. I am also pleased to announce that Darlington Borough Council has been successful in securing £2.08m of Government funding from Homes England for the Skinnergate new build scheme. This scheme will see a mix of new commercial and residential properties,

including 16 new Council homes being delivered with social rents, in the heart of the Town Centre.

35. Work is already underway on the construction phase of the scheme, which is due to complete in early 2027.

School Games Programme

36. The School Games Programme continues to work with all Primary, Secondary and Special Schools in Darlington. Between January and March 2026, 19 events have been made available to schools which have included Basketball, Multi Skills Festivals, Swimming Festivals, Tennis Festivals, Futsal, Football and Secondary T1 Rugby. The programme is running a Mental Health Awareness Day for schools to support Children's Mental Health Week, to empower, raise awareness and encourage open conversation to highlight the importance of mental health. To support International Woman's Day the School Games is holding an Army Outreach Elite Skills and Team Building day to inspire secondary school girls to be more active. It is estimated over 2000 young people have or will be taking part across all events with 64 Secondary School Sports Leaders supporting the events.

Dolphin Centre

37. Work has started on the plans to upgrade mechanical and electrical plant within the Dolphin Centre including the installation of indoor golf, darts and shuffleboard, as well as the introduction of a new spinning studio and an upgrade to the existing fitness studio. A temporary pop-up café has opened and increased opening times in 16 Horsemarket, which proved very popular at this early stage. Events are still being delivered in parallel with the ongoing capital project.
38. Various activities took place during February half term, including bowling, diving and swimming and this remained one of our busiest half term periods. We also re-introduced our extremely popular pool parties to complement the other half term activities.
39. Work continued on recruiting the student champions at Darlington College, and we recently engaged 10 students from various schools across Darlington by offering them work experience opportunities.
40. Five new fitness classes were introduced to the timetable from January following consultation with members and customers. These included additional Pilates, aqua aerobics and yoga sessions, as well as new classes in Triple 12 and Hydro Health. All were well attended, with sessions being fully booked on a regular basis.

Sport England Place Expansion

41. Darlington has now completed the three-month follow-up phase of the Sport England leadership programme since January 2026 building on the early insights and consultation gathered so far from community partners. The next stage will involve delivering dedicated insight events within each priority location. These events over the coming weeks will explore, in greater depth, the barriers young people and local communities experience when accessing green spaces, paths, parks, and community facilities.

42. These locality-based events will gather further insight that will directly shape the development of targeted test-and-learn pilots. By bringing partners, organisations, and community stakeholders together, the test-and-learn process will aim to strengthen collaboration, deepen shared understanding, and co-design practical solutions that support increased physical activity and improved active environments across Northgate, Red Hall, Skerne Park, and Albert Hill.

Darlington Playing Pitch and Facilities Strategy

43. Work continues on the development of a new Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and Built Facilities Strategy (BFS) for 2026 -2031. This will provide a strategic framework to ensure that the provision of outdoor and indoor sport pitches and facilities meet the needs of residents (both existing and future) and visitors to Darlington. We have had a 100 per cent response rate from all winter/summer sports clubs and the national governing bodies on the supply and demand for indoor facilities and playing pitch provision across the borough. The new strategy and action plan will be used to lever and monitor the delivery of improvement and investment into the sporting infrastructure across Darlington and is scheduled for completion in the first part of the new financial year.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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. The council has been awarded an overall Green rating by the Department for Transport for its approach to highway maintenance. We are one of only 16 authorities in the country to achieve this top rating.
3. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) Unc Clifton Road: Footway Reconstruction (0.193km)
 - (b) Unc Bates Avenue: Footway Reconstruction (0.069km)
 - (c) C34a Lime Lane: Carriageway Patching (1.100km)
 - (d) Unc. Milbank Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.200km)
 - (e) Unc. Nunnery Lane: Carriageway remedials (0.137km)
4. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Unc. East St: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.060km)
5. The recent prolonged period of wet weather has impacted our highway network with many instances of potholes and verge damage being reported. Our reactive maintenance crews have been working in all weather conditions but, on some occasions, repairs have needed to be temporary to make safe and crews will return to complete a more permanent repair as weather allows.

Bus Services

6. Working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the Council are reviewing supported services across the borough with a view to delivering improvements where these are affordable. The Council aspires to deliver improvements to services in the West End and to extend services in new developments like West Park and Elder Brook Park near Darlington Arena. It is expected that any improvements will use a mix of TVCA Local Authority Bus Grant funding and S106 funds.
7. The TeesFlex service will be withdrawn at the end of March 2026 and the funding diverted to two new fixed route services in the Tees Valley, one of which will serve rural communities in east Darlington on a temporary basis until the TVCA review of supported services is complete.

Safer Routes to School

8. The table below shows progress on Safer Routes to School (SRTS) schemes that are currently being developed. The construction dates are anticipated dates that 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 (objections received)	Construction (currently programmed)
Abbey Infants and Junior School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	It is planned to complete the scheme during the Easter school holidays
Stanhope Road North Puffin crossing	Complete	Complete	Complete	March 2026	June 2026	Planning application required for works in the park subject to outcome of consultation. Construction programmed for June/July 2026
St. Augustine's School 20mph scheme	Complete	To be completed	Update provided during February 2026	April 2026	July 2026	A revised proposal with a one-way system and traffic calming on Beechwood Avenue, plus a signed 20mph zone on Oakdene Avenue and South End Avenue is proposed
St Bede's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	TROs advertised January 2025	Complete	Summer holidays 2026. Organised to coincide with a planned maintenance scheme on Thompson Street East
Longfield School Puffin crossing	Complete	Complete	Engagement report complete	Not Required	Not Required	June/July 2026
Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme	Resident consultation by end of Spring 2026.	Complete	Awaiting outcome of consultation	TBD	TBD	Funding is in place subject to scheme consultation and way forward being agreed

Resident Parking Zone (RPZ) Review

9. The public consultation for the update on Resident Parking Zone Policy concluded in the Autumn with over 1,300 responses, which have been analysed and key themes have emerged. Consultation responses were presented to the January meeting of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee who have asked that the draft policy be presented to them for further input in due course. It is anticipated this will be in early Summer. The policy will be drafted from resident parking operation best practice that has been researched and will be adapted to ensure it works for the Borough of Darlington by considering the responses received in the public consultation.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Funding

10. The Government's LEVI fund directly supports the government's long-term strategy to accelerate EV adoption with the aim of the capital funding being twofold:
 - (a) to deliver a step-change in the deployment of local, primarily low-power, on-street charging infrastructure across England and
 - (b) accelerate the commercialisation of, and investment in, the local charging infrastructure sector.
11. The fund supports local authorities in England to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking and includes capital funding to contribute to the costs of delivering charge points. It also includes capability funding to employ and train new staff specifically to plan and deliver the charge point infrastructure
12. In April 2023, local authorities were informed of their LEVI capital funding allocation, with TVCA allocated a maximum of £6,596,000. Following a successful application, TVCA were awarded the full allocation in March 2024. Since the award, TVCA have been working with the LEVI Support Body, on project development. To satisfy the scope and conditions of the LEVI fund TVCA propose to procure a single Concessionaire on behalf of the five local authorities, to deliver and operate on-street charge points across the Tees Valley. The Concessionaire will finance, install, own, maintain and operate the on-street charging infrastructure, with 80 per cent of the agreed programme to be delivered within the first five years of the contract.
13. Darlington's preference around the type of on-street infrastructure that's installed, is defined through LEVI as 'pedestal charging' which describes a charging unit, requiring build outs on the carriageway, which could be installed in locations such as the end of terrace streets and in existing parking bays.
14. To achieve equity of access in the EVCI roll-out across the Tees Valley, TVCA will utilise LEVI capital funding to provide a degree of subsidy, with a list of key locations included in the tender specification which the Charge Point Operator (CPO) will be contractually obliged to deliver, subject to an agreed site assessment. Key locations included in the list incorporate areas where provision of on-street charging opportunities are of strategic or local importance but are likely to be less commercially attractive to the CPO.
15. TVCA issued the tender for the provision of on-street EVCI on 5 January 2026, with a closing date of end March 2026.

British Book Awards 2026

16. Darlington Libraries has been shortlisted among the finalists for The British Book Awards 2026 for Library of the Year.
17. Submissions are made by libraries who have implemented initiatives that reach deep into communities, improving the lives of individuals through storytelling and literature. Darlington's entry highlights two different projects aimed at reaching different audiences. The first, *On Track for Storytime*, gifted young children a book celebrating 200 years of our town's railway history alongside the production of a film featuring children reading and performing the story. The second was the campaign *Books that Bloom*, a print campaign to promote our digital reading offer of free books, audiobooks, magazines and newspapers, using seeded paper which when planted, grew wildflowers.

Social Media Engagement

18. Darlington Librarians welcomed the National Year of Reading with the re-release of a selection of high-quality short films featuring our incredible library spaces on social media, which have seen a record number of engagements with one film hitting over 73.5k views and 1.2k "likes" on Facebook. Over January their Facebook page accrued 240 new followers (up 176%) and over 91k viewers, an increase of 122%.

BookFit Challenge

19. The BookFit Challenge is underway, designed by Darlington Libraries for the National Year of Reading and linking health goals to reading goals. Our BookFit Challenge is open to adults aged 16+ and rewards reading of any format – including books, audiobooks, digital magazines and newspapers – with a "finish-line winner" chosen at random every month for a £10 shopping voucher.
20. The campaign is visible within libraries and doctors' surgeries around the town, highlighting the health and wellbeing benefits of reading. Assets for digital screens can be provided by contacting the library.

Children's Writing Competition

21. Libraries have been visiting selected schools offering a free writing competition in the run up to World Book Day, the winners will have their work published on the libraries' Borrowbox to download and read for free.

BookFest

22. Darlington Library's annual book festival for children and young people is back (first week of March). A fantastic variety of reading, digital, creative and cultural events for children and families in Darlington is offered completely free of charge, aiming to help even the poorest in our society to access a wide range of exciting opportunities.

Digital Loans

23. Our digital borrowing continues to grow as customers access free newspapers, magazines, books and audiobooks via our online apps, Borrowbox and uLibrary. This January, nearly 15k items were borrowed compared with over 9k in the same period last year. Libraries have been working hard to promote these excellent free apps with community pop-ups, and campaigns such as *Books That Bloom*.

Hopetown

24. *Brilli-ANT!* An immersive exhibition where inspiring insect encounters that show how even the smallest changes can make a huge difference, closed to the public on 15 March 2026. The exhibition, aimed at children aged 1 to 10-years, was very popular with families and schools who enjoyed the hands-on activities, storytelling, and accompanying workshops.
25. Hopetown Heritage Weekends are on the first full weekend of every month. During the heritage weekend the doors to Darlington Locomotive Works and the 1861 Shed are opened for visitors to engage with Darlington's pioneering and ongoing railway engineering. Visits are free, and each month will engage with a different railway-related theme. In February, visitors enjoyed pit walks, talks and could ring the replica Locomotion No.1's bell. Across the weekends, Saturdays are aimed at families and Sundays are aimed at the heritage audience. The S&DR 26 Miles team will be running craft activities at Hopetown on the Saturdays.
26. On Saturday 21 February Hopetown Darlington celebrated Chinese New Year with a day of a day of culture, celebration and colour. The Year of the Horse was celebrated with the S&DR 26 Miles team doing some fabulous horse-themed craft drop-in sessions. Visitors were also thrilled to see traditional Chinese Lion Dancers performing throughout the day.
27. In collaboration with Darlington Football Club, Hopetown Darlington are excited to announce a special-edition Hopetown Darlington-branded DFC football shirt. This shirt is part of an ongoing partnership celebration Darlington's culture and heritage and forms a small part of what will be our 'Summer of Sport' during the school summer holidays. There's only a limited number available and they are only available in-store at Hopetown Goods & Gifts.
28. February Half Term saw a week packed with family friendly hands-on activities, creative workshops and wild discoveries to keep the children entertained. From Bushcraft skills to bug handling sessions and science workshops, there was plenty for visitors to do as part of their visit to site during the school holidays.

Hippodrome

29. January was a strong month for the Hippodrome with the production and premier of *Horrible Histories the Concert*, Varna International Ballet offering 5 heavily sold performances, as well as popular tributes including the *ELO Show*. February highlights included Ellen Kent's Opera as part of her farewell tour, comedians Sue Perkins, Jason Manford and Chris McCausland, TV personality Michael Portillo as well as a presentation of *Macbeth (Revision on tour)* providing a great revision opportunity for hundreds of secondary school children from the local area.

30. Weekly engagement with community groups has continued with great success. These include Tuesday's warm space, Weekly Daisy Chain drop-in's and Dementia Café every Thursday.
31. The Hippodrome Youth theatre and dance groups and the Monday Movers (over-65 movement class) started back in mid-January after the Christmas break. They are now working towards the Darlington Dance Festival and theatre performances at the end of the summer term to be performed in the Hippodrome and Hullabaloo theatre spaces for family and friends.

Creative Darlington

32. There were 3,339 visits to Darlington Library Art Gallery during an exhibition of paintings by Darlington born artist Jane Noone (1934 – 1959) between 20 December 2025 and 5 February 2026. This was the first public exhibition of her work in Darlington in 60 years, and secured comments from a child aged 10 $\frac{3}{4}$, *"I love art and want to be an artist, and this gallery has inspired me even more!"* and adults, one remembering *"...Jane from my childhood, a lovely, warm and caring person, she taught me to swim in the old swimming baths, such a talented young woman"*. The Northern Echo featured this exhibition in articles on 13 December 2025 and Saturday 24 January 2026.
33. An exhibition of 27 works from Darlington Borough Art Collection opened on Saturday 7 February in Darlington Library and was on display until Thursday 26 February 2026 exploring the theme of change. Comments following the exhibition include, *"Brought back lots of memories of the 3 cooling towers!!"* and, *"Absolutely superb exhibition of Darlington paintings and drawings showing a rich variety of approaches to this varied and fascinating town Lovely to see the many changes to the townscape & surroundings!!"*. A group exhibition by artists from Darlington Mind followed this exhibition and will run between Saturday 28 February and Thursday 26 March 2026.
34. The Heritage and Culture fund (Creative Darlington) programme budget has contributed to partnership work between Darlington Hippodrome, Durham Music Service, Orchestras Live and Darlington schools since 2016. The 5 March 2026 concert by Royal Northern Sinfonia at Darlington Hippodrome began with a premiere performance of a new work showcasing local young peoples' talent and creativity, performed with Royal Northern Sinfonia musicians
35. Darlington's next Culture Strategy is being developed to cover the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2030. Meetings have been held or are being scheduled with stakeholders, including Arts Council England and Tees Valley Combined Authority, alongside creative enterprises and organisations based in the borough including The Forum Music Studios and Theatre Hullabaloo. A report will be presented to Community and Local Services Scrutiny in the coming months on the new Darlington Culture Strategy 2026 - 2030, the proposed Action Plan for delivery in 2026/27 and on delivery against the 2025/26 Action Plan.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

36. Restaurants across Darlington participated in the bi-annual Restaurant Week, offering promotional menus that attracted strong customer interest. Participating venues saw increases in footfall and table bookings during the campaign period, alongside some first-time visitors. Several restaurants also reported maintaining the promotional offers in response to sustained demand and positive customer uptake.
37. Chinese New Year celebrations brought vibrant colour and energy to the town centre, featuring spectacular lion and dragon dance performances that captivated visitors. Alongside the parade and traditional displays, families enjoyed a range of interactive activities, themed trails, and creative crafts, encouraging them to explore and engage with different areas of Darlington's high street.
38. Darlington has once again been recognised for the quality of its evening and night-time offer, with judges confirming in January 2026 that the town has successfully retained its Purple Flag status for another year. This achievement continues a longstanding track record of excellence, Darlington having first secured Purple Flag accreditation in 2019.
39. The Town Centre team programmed a drop-in day for businesses to learn about 2026 events and how they can get involved. These sessions aim to encourage more engagement and support from local businesses with opportunities for them to benefit from increased customers and footfall in their business and the town centre.
40. The Events Team has drafted the 2026 events calendar and is progressing with detailed programming. The programme has a strong focus on sustainability, prioritising the local suppliers, reusing existing equipment, and minimising waste across all planned activities.
41. Building on the success of previous town centre trails, which encourage movement along the high street, a new themed trail inspired by *The Magic Faraway Tree* was delivered featuring clues, prizes and family-friendly activities. Trails continue to provide valuable opportunities for local businesses to welcome new visitors into their shops and to showcase the breadth of Darlington's high street offer.

Environmental Services

42. Members will be aware that the council have had to delay the introduction of food waste and weekly recycling collections as we have been let down by the vehicle supplier, who have not fulfilled their order in time despite reassurances to the contrary. A new 'go-live' date of 2nd June has been confirmed.
43. Containers and information packs are being delivered to residents in readiness for the service. An ongoing communications plan is encouraging participation in recycling, ensuring as many residents as possible dispose of their waste in the correct manner. Over 136,000 people have seen social media posts relating to changes in waste collections. Further communications with the public will support the revised 'go live' date.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio

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COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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

Business Rates and Council Tax

2. Members will be aware that from April 2026, Darlington businesses will face a number of simultaneous changes in relation to their business rates.
3. Full details of the changes can be found on the DBC website. Over 4,000 Business Rates bills for 2026-27 have already been issued to Darlington businesses, including 444 digital e-bills, and we are anticipating a significant increase in enquiries and appeals.
4. In addition, over 54,800 Council Tax bills for 2026-27 have been issued to Darlington residents, including 7,848 digital e-bills. Our Revenues and Benefits team will be dealing with a significant increase in enquiries during this period and the best advice if residents have enquiries about their bill is to complete one of our on-line enquiry forms on the DBC website.

Digital Envelope

5. As previously reported to Members, our Revenues and Benefit team introduced a new, quicker way for residents and businesses to sign up for electronic bills for their Council Tax and Business Rates, called Digital Envelope. Since introducing the new service, over 1,100 Council Tax and Business Rates payers have signed up for the Digital Envelope service and in January 2026, just under a quarter of all bills were sent electronically, compared to 14% for the same period in 2025.
6. A reminder about signing up for Digital Envelope was sent as part of the annual billing exercise. The advantages of receiving e-bills are reductions in our carbon footprint, quicker notifications for resident and businesses and cost savings for the Council in terms of less paper, printing and postage.

Climate Change

7. The Dolphin Centre Solar PV installation is now completed. The performance forecast is anticipating 160,000 kWh energy generation per year with the amount of CO2 emissions avoided of 75,000 kg per year.
The estimated savings from the electricity bills is £35,500 per year.

Capital Projects and Design Services Management

8. The Council's capital programme has a wide range of exciting projects. A selection of some of the larger projects are outlined below.
 - (a) TVCA continue to manage the Darlington Station project; with works continuing to complete the internal fit out, the new pedestrian link bridge, platforms and canopy.
 - (b) Neasham Road and Sherborne housing schemes continue to progress well with units being handed over on a phased basis.
 - (c) The refurbishment works to provide office space at No.156 Northgate are due to complete by the end of March.
 - (d) The refurbishment works at the former Northern Echo building are also progressing well but there remains a delay with the new electrical supply required. The scheme's stakeholders are aware of the delay and mitigation measures are in place.
 - (e) The remaining demolition at the Skinnergate Housing site is progressing and is expected to complete in the coming weeks.
 - (f) CityHeart are bringing forward proposals for a number of key sites and are working on the business case and survey work required to inform the design of the proposed STEM Centre on Central Park.
9. Business cases continue to be developed to secure additional projects from funding opportunities.
10. There remains a risk of further inflation related effects on construction related costs.

Cyber Security

11. The world of technology continues to advance but this makes the job of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) team more complex. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence and the growth of Cyber Crime as a service presents significant challenges for businesses, particularly for Local Government, as demonstrated by a number of cyber threats we experienced over the Christmas period. The threat actors who perpetuate these attacks are continually testing our defences and the most prevalent attacks, Business Email Compromise, are becoming increasingly difficult to detect.
12. The Xentrall ICT team are continuously strengthening our cyber security posture to protect against this. ICT work very closely with Information Governance to conduct regular phishing simulations to educate our users and raise awareness. ICT also now have a dedicated Cyber Team to reduce the risk and impact of attack and an external Security Operations Centre that runs 365/24/7 to monitor and detect suspicious activity across our network.

Councillor Mandy Porter
Cabinet Member with Resources Portfolio

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

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

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

2. The Police are migrating their crime and ASB reporting records to a new system. This has coincided with a new analyst starting at Darlington Borough Council who is currently being trained on the new access and going through the access approval process. An update on statistics will be provided at a future meeting.

Crime

3. Reports from the Police are that crime this year is on course for a slight decrease compared to last year at this time.

ASB

4. The latest date available shows an increase in ASB compared to the previous year. However, reports from police suggest it is falling but still above last year's trends. Increases in ASB are seen across the Durham Police area and in many other areas across the Country.
5. Work continues to address ASB and between 16 December 2025 up to and including 11 February 2026.
 - (a) Ten young people received first warnings for ASB in the Cockerton and Town Centres areas for low level ASB.
 - (b) Five young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA). Ten young people committed ABA breaches.
 - (c) Nine young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young People's Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention.
 - (d) Six young people are awaiting interview.
 - (e) Two youths still subject to a Civil Injunction.
 - (f) The ASB prevention officer has carried out one ASB session with a school (years 5 & 6). And one ASB & Fire Awareness joint session with a school (years 5 & 6), alongside Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

Environmental Crime

6. Work continues to address environmental crime and between 16 December 2025 up to and including 11 February 2026.
 - (a) Three Fixed Penalty Notices were issued: 2 x £100 Breach of PSPO for drinking in a public place, 1 x £100 Breach of PSPO for Begging.
 - (b) Three prosecutions for S110 offences for environmental waste/ Fly tipping, totalling £1,644 (this covers fines, costs and victim surcharge. 1 further case for summons to court for S110 offence – scheduled court date is 25 February 2026 (a Section 110 offence is failure or refusal to provide information reasonably required by a registered officer for waste offences).
 - (c) 4 Community Protection Warnings issued
 - (d) 2 Community Protection Notices issued
 - (e) 1 PSPO Warning issued in relation to Household Waste presentation.
 - (f) Section 46 Notices were delivered to 8 Address's within Darlington (a section 46 notice is a legal notice issued under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.) They are issued to residents who fail to comply with the wheeled bin and recycling scheme. The notice also contains information regarding the consequences of non-compliance.

Begging Incidents

7. Begging incidents over the last three months (Nov– Jan 2026) continues to show a decrease compared to same period last year. There has been dedicated patrols, street walks, and joined-up partnership working.
8. There is currently a cohort of around 20 people begging mostly inactive due to the strategic approach. There are a small number of persons who continue to be the focus of attention for partners. We offer various support through our dedicated 'out-reach worker' who engages and signpost them to the right service required.
9. We continue to carryout media campaigns on begging and educate the members of the public on ways to report incidents of begging. The most recent media campaigns was a walk about video on how we engage during the regular multi-agency street support walk. This is in-line with the multi-agency strategic approach through the 4 action pathways, empathy, engagement, education, and enforcement.

Community Safety Partnership

10. Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is currently in the process of reviewing the new CSP plan which will be a 3-year plan that will focus on the priorities arising from evidence and consultation with residents and businesses.

Trading Standards

11. An animal welfare breach was notified to us and has been investigated. A letter of warning has been issued following an advice visit. Visits and liaison with Civic Enforcement with regard to horses causing concern over security.
12. Three premises have been closed until 16 March 2026 by Peterlee Magistrates Court following reports of illegal sales and anti-social behaviour from these three stores. These are being reviewed and landlords consulted in order to determine whether an extension application to the Courts would be appropriate. Further closure applications are listed with the Court.
13. The team will continue to participate in Operation Cece and Joseph, which look at targeting suppliers of illegal cigarettes and vapes with a particular focus on any suspected selling to children. Underage sales test purchasing is planned in relation to a variety of age restricted products to check on compliance. Test purchasers have now been secured, and arrangements are being made for the first round of test purchases in February. All traders who supply age restricted products have received an advice letter and been advised that we will be undertaking test purchasing. The test purchasing activity is scheduled.
14. A number of toys have been purchased and will be submitted for safety compliance. Liaison with the test house is taking place as to appropriate tests.

Private Sector Housing

Renters Rights Act 2025

15. The Private Sector Housing Team is currently working with colleagues across the Council to assist in the implementation of phase 1 the Renters Rights Act 2025. A wide range of changes are due to be introduced for the private rented sector (PRS) on 1 May 2026 initially concentrating on tenancy reform. Later changes significantly change the way in which the Private Sector Housing currently operates following, the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies; the rollout of the PRS Database and PRS Landlord Ombudsman; and changes to the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards and the introduction of a Decent Homes Standard in the PRS (expected in 2035).

Energy Company Obligation scheme

16. The Energy Company Obligation scheme has been cancelled and will not be renewed. ECO4 however has been extended from the original end date of 31 March 2026 to 31 December 2026 following the publication of the government's Warm Homes Plan. 98 ECOflex applications have been processed by Darlington Borough Council since the private sector housing team resumed accepting applications in October 2025, these have mainly been for new gas boilers, loft insulation and heating controls. The loss of this scheme will affect the availability of home improvements available and the availability of replacement gas boilers. Since January 2013, 6,042 households have received ECO measures in Darlington.

Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme

17. Darlington Borough Council, as part of a consortium, are working with E.ON Green Homes Funding Solutions to deliver energy efficiency improvements to homes under the Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme. Under this scheme eligible homes can receive up to £15,000 for energy performance measures and a further £15,000 for low-carbon heating. Following the publication of the government's Warm Homes Plan interest in the Warm Homes Local Grant Scheme has increased. We are expecting further interest from private landlords, who can also improve one of their properties at no cost, following the government announcement that privately rented properties will be required to reach the equivalent of an EPC band C by 1 October 2030.

Licensing

18. Darlington's Licensing Act 2003 Policy is due to be revised in October this year (5-year statutory cycle), and a report is with the Licensing Committee seeking approval for public consultation. Key issues for inclusion will be the new National Licensing Policy Framework released in November 2025, alcohol deliveries, spiking, illegal working and Martyn's Law.
19. The Street Trading Policy review is complete, and a report has been submitted to the Licensing Committee for consideration and approval. They will then make recommendations to Council for a final decision on its introduction. Key proposals will be a revised and reduced number of static town centre trading locations, due to a lack of interest from traders and the impact they can have on local businesses; static out-of-town trading locations limited to recognised laybys due to safety issues on the highway; a revised application process that will improve decision-making and transparency.
20. Funding for taxi marshals ends on 31 March, and there are no new funding streams. An exit strategy is being developed with key partners, along with a communication plan. With the introduction of app-based private hire companies such as Uber, demand for on-rank taxis has declined in recent years, and the number of taxis available in Darlington to meet peak-time demand has increased.
21. A new government consultation has commenced exploring the possibility of local transport authorities being responsible for taxi licensing. This closes on 1st April. If introduced, it will require a major piece of work to combine the processes of all Tees Valley Licensing Authorities and will have a significant impact on how the licensing service is delivered. With the recent approval of its revised Taxi Policy, Darlington is well-positioned should it be introduced.
22. Authority is being sought for the introduction of Fixed Penalty Tickets for animal welfare offences. If introduced, it will allow Licensing and Trading Standards to recover the costs of investigating unlicensed dog breeding, among other offences. This will be in accordance with DEFRA guidance. A report will be submitted to the next Licensing Committee to discuss the proposal and seek approval; the final decision will be made by the Council.
23. On 14 January, a Darlington woman was ordered to pay fines and costs totalling £262 after pleading guilty to the unlicensed selling of dogs and puppies. Since June 2022, she

advertised 24 dogs for sale, and if all sold for the asking price, would have made in excess of £11,000.

Benefit Enquiry Action Team (BEAT)

24. The Benefit Enquiry Action Team (BEAT) campaign continues to support residents from across the borough. Throughout 2025, the campaign benefitted from an extra boost in funding from the Household Support Fund, increasing capacity, and raising the total amount of extra income claimed by local people to £3.3m. On 19 February 2026 the campaign was shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Award within the Public / Private Partnership category, with the winners to be confirmed in June 2026.

Crisis and Resilience Fund

25. The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) has been made available to local authorities in England to support low-income households who encounter a financial shock and to support activity that builds individual and community financial resilience. The funding covers the period of 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029 inclusive. This includes specified funding for housing support.
26. CRF replaces Household Support Fund and introduces different objectives outlined below. It is intended as a shift from short-term emergency help under HSF, to a more preventative approach through a greater emphasis on building financial resilience. It also brings together key support into one simple, streamlined fund by incorporating Discretionary Housing Payments, making it easier for Authorities to deliver help and for people to access it.
27. The Housing Payment element will commence from April 2026 and replaces Discretionary Housing Payments with a phased transition.
28. The primary objective of The Fund is to both provide a safety net for those on low incomes who encounter a financial shock and to invest in building local financial resilience to enable individuals and communities to better deal with crises in the long-term, reducing crisis need.
29. Within the CRF, Authorities are encouraged to invest in 'Resilience Services' that contribute towards improving the financial resilience of individuals. Financial resilience refers to the ability of individuals to withstand and recover from financial shocks – such as sudden income loss or unexpected expenses.
30. The Fund will focus on three main outcomes:
 - (a) **Outcome 1: Provision of effective crisis support.** Delivering effective financial crisis support to prevent the occurrence or escalation of individuals' crises. This includes the provision of financial support towards housing needs, to those who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs.
 - (b) **Outcome 2: Improving individuals' financial resilience.** By strengthening financial resilience among individuals.

(c) **Outcome 3: Bolstering the local-level support landscape.**

A joined-up, visible local support network enabling those seeking crisis support to be appropriately referred to services that build their individual financial resilience.

31. Officers are currently working with colleagues in the voluntary sector to devise an effective programme.”

Councillor Garner
Stronger Communities Portfolio

COUNCIL
26 March 2026

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.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership – Annual Report 2024/25

2. The Committee received the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP), outlining the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements across 2024/25. Members noted the continued focus on strengthening practice models and ensuring safeguarding arrangements remain responsive to the needs of children, young people, and adults with care and support needs.
3. The Partnership has undertaken significant work to revise leadership and governance arrangements, including the creation of a new Management Group responsible for assurance and oversight across both children's and adults' services. Key themes highlighted to Members included the Partnership's emphasis on prevention and early intervention, statutory requirements relating to children which inform approaches to adults, and the increasing challenges associated with self-neglect and hoarding.
4. Members discussed Child Exploitation training delivered with Barnardo's, the availability of local self-neglect data, and the mechanisms in place to support Gypsy Roma communities in reporting safeguarding concerns. The Committee also noted that 78.7% of people receiving social care reported feeling safe (Q3), the second highest return regionally and third highest nationally.
5. Scrutiny also noted and wished to congratulate Amanda Hugill on her retirement following 40 years with the Local Authority and thanked her for her work with scrutiny in her most recent post within the Safeguarding Team.

Care Homes in Executive Strategy Measures

6. The Committee received an overview of the Local Authority's responsibilities under the Care Act 2014 in relation to organisational safeguarding and considered the current position of care homes subject to Executive Strategy Procedures (ESP).
7. Members noted that ESP is a formal multi-agency process used where a provider's practice or governance raises serious safeguarding concerns. The Committee was informed of the updated DSP procedure, which strengthens joint working, information-sharing and action planning. Two care homes in Darlington are currently subject to ESP due to concerns including medication errors, management oversight, safeguarding reporting, and staffing levels.

8. The Committee received assurance that both homes are subject to sustained oversight through multi-agency meetings, monitoring of action plans, quality assurance visits, medication optimisation, governance reviews, and checks on safeguarding practice and recruitment. Members raised questions about the challenges of monitoring multiple providers and the level of support available to them.

Performance Indicators – Quarter 2 2025/26

9. The Committee reviewed performance against key Adult Social Care indicators for Quarter 2. Of the twelve indicators monitored by the Committee, eight had data available at Q2.
10. Members noted improved performance in admissions to long-term residential and nursing care for both older people (ASC002) and adults aged 18–64 (ASC003). Performance remained stable for indicators relating to reablement outcomes and the uptake of self-directed support (ASC019, ASC049, ASC050), with no indicators performing worse than the same period in 2024/25.
11. Three safeguarding-related indicators (ASC208, ASC209, ASC211) were noted as point-in-time measures and therefore not directly comparable year-on-year. Two information-access indicators (ASC054, ASC055) are collected annually, with updated figures to be reported at year-end. Members were advised that national changes to ASCOF and data requirements mean that indicators relating to adults with learning disabilities (ASC045, ASC046) are no longer reportable and replacements are in development.
12. Access to information has improved significantly, with 82% of people reporting that information is easy to find, following enhancements to the web page and call-handling arrangements. Members queried the broader contextual pressures affecting performance, including housing need, and discussed ways to improve residents' understanding of Adult Social Care, including through ward newsletters.

Work Programme 2025/26

13. The Committee reviewed its work programme and noted that the Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) report is scheduled for the next meeting on 14 April 2026. No additional changes were requested.

Councillor Andrew Anderson
Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee

COUNCIL
DATE

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.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2024-25

2. We welcomed the Safeguarding Partnership Business Manager who presented the report which Local Safeguarding Partnerships are required to produce to account for the Partnerships' achievements over the previous year and make an assessment of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements within the local area. The report summarises and reflects on the work of the Partnership over the 2024/25 period.
3. Points of note included the introduction of new roles within the partnership moving forward with Chief Officers holding overarching responsibilities for safeguarding arrangements with Education colleagues being incorporated. The previous role of Independent Chair has been changed to Lead Partnership Chair and the role is currently undertaken by the Director of People Group, Darlington Borough Council. An Independent Scrutineer has also been appointed to help drive improvement across the partnership.
4. A member asked to clarify the chairing arrangements for the Partnership and was informed that this operates on a rotating basis to ensure fairness amongst partners.
5. We noted the content of the report and members commented on the quality of information provided. The Committee also expressed their gratitude for the work of Amanda Hugill, Safeguarding Partnership Business Manager throughout her many years working for Darlington Borough Council and wished her a happy retirement.

Child Care Sufficiency Review 2025

6. We were joined by the Head of Education Partnerships who presented members with the report. Local authorities are required to 'secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 or up to 18 for disabled children'. In carrying out this requirement, local authorities should 'report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents'.
7. The childcare market in Darlington is made up of private day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs, nursery schools and nursery units. Cases of unmet demand are gathered using various methods: from providers through the monthly attendance returns, by analysing parental enquiries via the Families Information Service (FIS), via the unmet demand list and from any parental complaints to the local authority.

There have been no indications that there has been a lack of sufficiency overall in the borough during the period of the review

8. The National Childcare Expansion Programme is ongoing. The changes are as follows:
 - a) From September 2024, the introduction of 15 hours of funded childcare for eligible working parents of babies from 9 months up to 2 years old.
 - b) From September 2025, the introduction of 30 hours of funded childcare for eligible working parents of babies from 9 months up to 3 years old.
 - c) A government ambition is that by 2026, parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term time childcare in their local area from 8am – 6pm so that parents can access employment and improve labour market participation.
9. The National Wraparound Childcare Programme is part of the childcare reforms announced in the Spring Budget 2023. Local authorities have been allocated start-up funding over two academic years to support schools to increase the number of places offered to parents. To date, 14 schools have been awarded grants to expand the number of places available or create new places. The total number of places expected to be made available to parents/carers through the programme is approximately 400.
10. Questions were raised which included clarification of the “Disabled Access Fund” with officers confirming that this is a £925 payment per child for a care setting to spend on staff, time or resources which is followed up by the Link Officer to ensure monies are spent properly.

A member raised the point that 76% of carer applicants do not have the appropriate qualifications and asked if assistance is available for this. Officers confirmed that links exist with Darlington College with various routes to qualifications available and that they attempt to signpost applicants, but that staff will look into boosting communications going forward where possible.

It was also asked if specific childcare offers are available for single men with officers confirming that care offers are equal to all who require them while acknowledging the reluctance of many men to apply for assistance and will aim to be explicit going forward that offers are available to all who qualify.
11. The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion alongside Members and Portfolio Holder expressed their gratitude for the work carried out by staff in with the smooth integration of the new expanded offer.
12. We noted the content of the report and that sufficient childcare is available in Darlington.

Annual Fostering Report

13. The Service Manager, Children’s Services presented members with an overview of the Fostering Report covering the period April 2024 – March 2025. Main themes including the ongoing focus on recruitment with 10 new foster carers joining the service and that the outlook is good with annual reviews retuning positive feedback. It was expressed that the next annual report will strive to have an enhanced focus on Darlington ambitions.
14. A member asked if it is common for single men to apply to be foster carers with officers confirming that it is rare with none currently present in Darlington

15. Members noted the annual report and the information provided and praised the service for their positive work during the period.

Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2025-2026

16. The Assistant Director Children's Services presented performance information covering the period July 2025 – September 2025. Points of note include a 46% overall increase in referral numbers when compared to the same period 12 months prior, of which 10.6% were re-referrals which is well below the 18% limit, 83% of referrals were completed within the timeframes which is an increase on previous figures but is a focus for improvement still.
138 children had a Child Protection (CP) plan open at the end of September 2025; an increase compared to 99 in September 2024. 57 plans were started in Q2 2025/26 however this increase is relative to the overall increase in total referrals.
Placement stability remains a key focus for the service and is also showing positive development.
17. Members raised questions which included if work around those aged 22–25 were identified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is being promoted with officers confirming that it is with a formal SEND Young Persons Group being created who will assist in the creation of plans moving forward.
A member asked to clarify placement distances and costs with officers commenting that the aim is place children within 20 miles of their home base in order to help maintain their current networks.
It was asked if the increase in violent incidents is a reason for concern and members were informed that this is not a general increase but that one children's home is experiencing very challenging children at present.
18. We noted the performance information provided and agreed to raise any further queries with the appropriate officers.

Work Programme

19. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2025/26, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Councillor Hilary Allen
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

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COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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.

Community Safety Plan 2026-2029

2. We gave consideration to the draft Community Safety Plan 2026-2029 prior to its consideration by Cabinet and Full Council. The current Community Safety Partnership (CSP) plan 2021-2026 is coming to the end of its life cycle and the new CSP Plan will be a three-year plan (2026-2029).
3. Members were provided with details of the consultation process undertaken by the CSP to understand the public's views and perceptions on crime and anti-social behaviour and priorities for the CSP.
4. Members raised concern regarding the low response rate to the consultation, discussed begging and enforcement in the town centre and highlighted that residents are hesitant to report anti-social behaviour due to perceived lack of action.
5. We have requested that Cabinet be advised that Members support the four priority areas in the draft Community Safety Plan 2026-2029 and that an overarching strategy within the Community Safety Plan 2026–2029 should be developed to strengthen public confidence in reporting crime and anti-social behaviour, improve public understanding of how and when incidents should be reported, and streamline reporting mechanisms to ensure residents can easily and consistently report crime and anti-social behaviour through accessible and well-understood channels.

Annual Electric Vehicle Charging Policy Review

6. Scrutiny received a report updating Members on electric vehicle (EV) charging following on from the adoption of the Darlington Electric Vehicle Charging Policy in February 2025.
7. The Council's approach to electric vehicle charging is to provide and encourage the use of shared public facilities, with provision available in Council owned car parks and the next phase is to create commercially operated charging hubs in community locations. We were provided with details of the trials being undertaken in the Tees Valley and the UK in the development of cross pavement charging solutions.
8. Members were provided with details of Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding and we noted that the TVCA received an allocation of £6.596M. We were informed that in order to satisfy the scope and conditions of the LEVI fund, the TVCA propose to procure a single Concessionaire on behalf of the five local authorities, to deliver and operate on-street charge points across the Tees Valley.

9. Members discussed the funding arrangements further, raised concerns regarding demand for EV chargers and ongoing costs for the Council and discussed the limitations of cross paving channels and the use of cable mats.

Active Travel Neighbourhoods' Feasibility Report

10. Members welcomed a report setting out the proposed requirements of Active Travel Neighbourhoods and detailing the proposed requirements of Active Travel Neighbourhoods Feasibility outlined in a draft policy.
11. Members were advised that as part of the development of the Active Travel Neighbourhood Feasibility, a review of the current Department for Transport guidance has been undertaken, along with considering Active Travel England toolkits and best practice to develop measures to encourage walking and cycling and that a comprehensive communications plan will be developed to ensure all stakeholder views are included. This will also include Member engagement.
12. Members made reference to the benefits of active travel neighbourhoods and concerns were raised regarding the existing cycle routes. Members noted that there is an overarching Tees Valley Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in place to deliver improvements to the transport network.

Network Management Plan

13. Scrutiny received a report setting out the requirements and timeline for implementing a Network Management Plan, a statutory requirement under the Traffic Management Act 2004. Which sets out how a local traffic authority should manage the highway network to ensure the expeditious movement of traffic with a primary aim of reducing congestion and disruption.
14. We noted that there are no statutory timescales to update the Network Management Plan and this is undertaken when required. We look forward to receiving a future draft version of the Network Management Plan prior to approval by Cabinet.

Work Programme

15. We gave consideration to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the Municipal Year 2025/26 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.
16. Members have requested that an update be provided on the 'Introduction of the Renters Rights Act 2025' at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee. Members proposed that an update on household food waste recycling be provided at a future meeting of this committee and noted that the item 'City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements Update' was covered as part of the Local Transport Plan update and could be considered for removal from the work programme in the next municipal year.

Councillor James McGill
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 3 2025/26

2. We received a report for us to consider the Project Position Statement and Capital Monitoring for Quarter 3.
3. We considered the report which provided information on the delivery of the Council's capital programme and a summary of current construction projects. The report included the projected outturn of the Capital Programme is £340.048m against an approved programme of £340.168m.
4. Discussion ensued around the Skinnergate Project, we wanted clarification around the demolition progress and the reasons behind the delays. It was explained to us that in December the contractor encountered asbestos which was reported to the Health and Safety Executive which ultimately caused further delays. We asked what the current end date was and the revised schedule following on from the delay.
5. We queried the closeout process for the projects rated green and concerns were raised around the 'Homes Upgrade Grant', we agreed to submit a Quad of Aims to review this in further detail.

Revenue Budget Monitoring Quarter 3 2025/26

6. We received a report providing an early forecast of the 2025/26 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process to be presented on 3 February Cabinet.
7. We were provided with the third revenue budget management report 2025/26 which included financial records to November and managers projections for the remainder of the year. Assumptions had been made concerning the future demand for services over the final quarter.
8. The report included the Council's projected revenue reserves position at the end of 31 March 2026 are £9.787m, £1.398m more than the initial 2025-29 MTFP position. The position related to a decline in corporate resources of £0.481m, offset by £0.390m of departmental savings and £1.489m of additional balances following the 2024/25 outturn.
9. We raised concerns around the underperformance in Hopetown and proposed to submit a quad of aims to review the financial performance of Hopetown at a future meeting.
10. We sought clarification on section 38 fees and developer roads, particularly regarding delays in adoption due to unsatisfactory standards.

Performance Indicators

11. We received a report providing us with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 2 2025/26.
12. It was reported that of the 22 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 18 of the had been updated on a six-monthly basis and all 22 annually.
13. We entered discussion around the economic activity rate not improving, though monthly unemployment payments had improved. We requested some narrative on the drop of 250,000 town centre visits and the drop in council tax arrears collected. We queried whether footfall data could be differentiated between daytime and night-time.

Councillor Rebecca Baker
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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.

Healthcare Associated Infections Update

2. We welcomed a report and presentation explaining what healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs) are, how they occur, and the key measures used to prevent them and how infections spread within healthcare environments. We were provided with details of the roles of the organisations responsible for preventing and managing HCAIs and an overview of some of the work taking place locally in relation to HCAIs.
3. The presentation provided figures for NHS antibiotic consumption and antimicrobial resistance for Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacterales (CPE), MRSA, MSSA and C.difficile infections for 2025/26 and Members were provided with details of County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust's actions to reduce HCAI's, with particular reference made to examples of collaborative working to address CPE outbreaks. Members were also provided with details of the work undertaken in relation to antimicrobial stewardship, including a rolling programme of audit compliance, reducing the use of high risk antibiotics and education of staff.
4. We discussed the risk assessment approach in relation to bathing, with Members being assured that these are based on the individual, and in relation to MRSA infections Executive-led patient infection reviews have been implemented and policy has been changed to introduce universal screening to allow early identification of infections and inform a targeted screening programme in the future.
5. We have requested further information regarding the impact of HCAI of CPE within care home settings and we discussed the learning from the CPE outbreak within the Trust. Members noted that audits had previously shown poor compliance in relation to infection prevention control, including handwashing, and that this has been addressed over a three-year period through direct conversations and continued engagement with staff in relation to their roles and responsibilities and expectations regarding the Trust's policy for hand hygiene. External auditors have also supported this process and the Trust continues to undertake validation audits.
6. Members were advised that nationally work is being undertaken by a group of specialists to help inform the NHS new hospital programme and this included a review of risks associated with wastewater, drainage and ventilation.
7. We held a further discussion on CPE with Members being advised that discharge summaries would include information for those patients identified as carrying CPE and the patient would also be informed, however no further actions are required by care homes

beyond usual IPC practice and in relation to the ward refresh, the work is ongoing and will happen over a period of time, to manage the financial and logistical requirements.

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030

8. We received a presentation providing Members with an annual review of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
9. The presentation outlined the key aims of the strategy, provided details of the number of homeless presentations, total number of days spent in temporary accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough across the Northeast region. Figures were also provided for the number of households with children in temporary accommodation. We recognised the pressures on the Council and its partners in dealing with increased levels of homeless presentations, the demand for temporary accommodation, and the difficulty in sourcing good quality move on accommodation.
10. Members were provided with details of the good progress on the strategy and the work undertaken since the strategy was implemented, including setting up a new Homeless Forum, a multi-agency partnership which had been established to help drive improvements and enhance partnership working, the recruitment of a dedicated housing options officer (domestic abuse) and increased temporary accommodation units, including the Single Homeless Accommodation Programme and the 700 Club's Forever Homes project. Members also noted that Task and Finish groups had been established as part of the forum to look at a range of specific areas, including improving information available for the public and professionals, sourcing more move-on accommodation and increasing specialist accommodation for people with complex needs.
11. We were also informed that the new National Plan to End Homelessness was published on 11 December 2025 which outlined a requirement for each local authority to produce a new action plan by October 2026 with sign off by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and that actions must be based on local need and link in with the Council's homeless strategy.
12. We welcomed the next steps for the next 12 months, including improving information available for the public and professionals, sourcing more move-on accommodation and increasing specialist accommodation for people with complex needs. Following a question about the numbers of homeless presentations, we were advised that these figures included repeat presentations for homelessness with Members noting the work undertaken to address these; and following a question, we were advised that improved engagement with private landlords was needed with the introduction of the Renters Rights Act and what incentives could be made available.
13. Following a question, we were informed that there had been an increase in the number of families presenting as homeless; that this was thought to be as a result of Section 21 notices being served; and that given the numbers on the waiting list, there was a lack of move-on properties. Confirmation was given that, whilst bed and breakfast accommodation was sometimes used to house families temporarily in emergencies, the Council has never exceeded the 6-week limit. We noted that additional properties were also being sought from other regulated social housing providers.

14. Further discussion ensued regarding hidden homelessness, and we were assured that work was undertaken to identify those at risk of rough sleeping. However, we noted the positive impact outreach support was having on rough sleeping.

Work Programme

15. 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.
16. A number of items were suggested for inclusion on the work programme for the next municipal year, including Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategy, Housing Services Rent Setting Policy, Housing Services Annual Report 2025-26 and Oral Health Promotion Strategy.

Councillor Neil Johnson
Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee

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