



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Agenda

10.00 am

Thursday, 4 September 2025

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington. DL1 5QT

Members of the Public are welcome to attend this Meeting.

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting
2. Declarations of Interest
3. To approve the Minutes of this Scrutiny held on 26 June 2025 (Pages 5 - 8)
4. Consultation on a Homes Strategy for the Borough – Report of the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection(Pages 9 - 64)
5. Climate Change and Nature Strategy – Report of the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection (Pages 65 - 82)
6. Performance Indicators Quarter 4 2024/2025 – Report of the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection, Head of Culture, Assistant Director of Law and Governance, Assistant Director of Housing and Revenues and Assistant Director of Resources (Pages 83 - 102)
7. Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2024/25 – Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance (Pages 103 - 246)
8. Complaints Made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman Service – Report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance (Pages 247 - 256)

9. Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2025/26 – Report of the Executive Director Environment, Highways and Community Services and the Executive Director of Resources and Governance (Pages 257 - 272)
10. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2025/26 Report - Quarter 1 – Report of the Assistant Director of Resources (Pages 273 - 298)
11. Investment Fund Update Report – Report of the Assistant Director of Resources (Pages 299 - 308)
12. Work Programme – Report of the Assistant Director of Law and Governance (Pages 309 - 322)
13. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting
14. Questions

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

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Wednesday, 27 August 2025

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

Councillors Coe, Baker, Dillon, Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

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

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26 June 2025

PRESENT – Councillors , Coe, Dillon, Durham, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baker, Haszeldine and McEwan,

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Resources)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brett Nielsen (Assistant Director Resources), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER152 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER153 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 3 APRIL 2025

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3 April 2025 be approved as a correct record.

ER154 TO CONSIDER THE DATES AND TIMES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/2026

RESOLVED – It was agreed that for the Municipal Year 2025/26, meetings of this Scrutiny Committee be held at 10.00 a.m. on the dates agreed in the Calendar of Meetings.

ER155 COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX, BUSINESS RATES AND RENT 2024-25

The Assistant Director of Housing and Revenues submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2024-25 and consider the write-off debts over £1,000 that are irrecoverable before approval by Cabinet on the 8 July 2025.

The report explained that the Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council rents during 2024-25 had continued to be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. However, the report explained that despite the challenges a total of £143.45m had been collected for 2024-25, £79.19m of Council Tax, £33.78m of Business Rates and £30.48m of Council rents.

The report stated that approval is to be sought to write-off a total of £1,226,320 of debts in respect to individual cases exceeding £1,000 for the financial year 2024-25. The report explained that it had become apparent that no further steps can be taken to recover the following sums, £386,385 of Council Tax, £331,368 of Business Rates, £174,791 of former Council tenant arrears, £86,253 of Housing Benefit overpayments, £247,523 of sundry debts.

Members asked what the percentages would be for what we did and did not collect and how

the statistics for Darlington Borough Council compare to other authorities.

Conversation ensued around how the Council differentiates individuals who can pay but will not and individuals who can not afford to pay. Members asked if the council has a good working relationship with Citizens Advice.

Members asked if it would be possible to look into the sundry debts further when the report next attends the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED - That Members noted the report and the forward submission to Cabinet.

ER156 PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - OUTTURN 2024/25

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance and the Executive Director of Environment, Highways and Community Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the current position in relation to the delivery of the Council's Capital Programme, the financial outturn positions as 31 March 2025 and the proposed financing of the 2024/25 capital expenditure, together with an update on the current status of all construction projects being undertaken by the Council.

It was reported that there had been significant enhancements made to the Council's assets in three major programme areas of schools, housing and transport which used mainly external funding as well as several other largescale schemes in the Borough. The investments delivered a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and most importantly to Council services. This included refurbishments of Council homes, improved learning environments in schools, better traffic flows and opportunities for sustainable travel.

The report detailed the total capital expenditure for 2024/25 was £51.712m. The report also included that the Council currently had 22 live projects with an overall project outturn value of £132.748m. Most projects have been running to time, cost and quality expectations with no foreseeable issues.

Discussion ensued around the Skinnergate project, Members wanted to know the current status of the project and if there had been any impacts to businesses on Skinnergate.

Conversation then moved onto Hoptown project and Members asked for further information on the legal advice that had been sought around the areas of dispute. Members also asked for clarification around the overspend budget position.

Members questioned the increase of unsupported borrowing from last year to this year and the reason behind this. Other queries Members raised were in relation to the Home Upgrade Grants and the Revenue contribution into the Capital Expenditure.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the 2024/25 Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Outturn report .

ER157 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN 2024/25

The Executive Director of Resources and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated), which was being considered by Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 8th July 2025, requesting Members to consider the 2024/25 revenue outturn.

It was reported that the Councils General Fund reserves position at the 31 March 2025 is £12.607m, which is an increase of £0.264m on the planned balances in the 2024-28 MTFP. This improvement related to the £1.321m underspend in the Councils 2023/24 financial results, £0.777m projected departmental overspends in the 2024/25 financial year and a £0.280m decrease in corporate resources. The report included a number of carry forward requests which will assist with projected slippage and pressures in the coming year.

Discussion ensued around the savings in relation to staffing in social care, members asked for further information behind this. Members asked for the overall running costs for the Hopetown Project and whether Hopetown has its own accounts.

RESOLVED - That Members noted the 2024/25 Revenue Budget Management Outturn report.

ER158 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme for this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

Various items were previously added to the work programme through the Annual Briefing of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee which took place on the 28th May 2025.

Members also discussed items such as Procurement and the Nature Restoration Plan to be added to the Work Programme for the next Municipal Year.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be approved.

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Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
4 September 2025

CONSULTATION ON A HOMES STRATEGY FOR THE BOROUGH

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

- 1. To consider the Homes Strategy for the Borough which was agreed for consultation at Cabinet on 8 July 2025.

Summary

- 2. A draft Homes Strategy has been prepared, and it was agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 8 July 2025 that the Council would consult on the Strategy. The Cabinet report and Homes Strategy are attached at **APPENDIX 1**.

Recommendation

- (a) It is recommended that Members consider the draft Homes Strategy and make any formal comments as part of the consultation.

Trevor Watson
Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection

Background Papers

Draft Homes Strategy and Cabinet Report.

David Hand : Extension 6294

Council Plan	The strategy supports the core priority of homes that are affordable, secure and meet the current and future needs of residents. There are also a range of indirect benefits for the other priorities of the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	The draft strategy considers inequalities around age and disability. It sets priorities and actions to provide positive impacts on these inequalities in relation to housing provision. This will help to ensure opportunities are accessible to everyone for good housing. It is important to note that the strategy brings together a number of existing Council policies and strategies which have been subject to equality impact assessment.

Tackling Climate Change	Includes measures and actions the Council aims to achieve in terms of housing to mitigate climate change and reduce carbon emissions.
Efficient and effective use of resources	A number of the existing policies and strategies referenced in the document support the efficient and effective use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	High quality homes in the right places supports the health and wellbeing of local residents.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are benefits in reducing levels of crime through several of the priorities in the strategy. For example, encouraging good design and placemaking, urban regeneration and tackling homelessness.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The Homes Strategy will be monitored and reviewed by the planning policy team and other related service areas. There will be no direct impact on the Council's budget. When approved it will form part of the Council's policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Positive impacts with regards to the provision of supported and specialist housing.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

3. See Cabinet report APPENDIX 1.

Outcome of Consultation

4. Consultation is ongoing.

**CABINET
8 JULY 2025**

CONSULTATION ON A HOMES STRATEGY FOR THE BOROUGH

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

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

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

Summary

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

Recommendations

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

Reasons

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

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

Background Papers

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

David Hand: Extension 6294

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

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

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

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

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

Consultation

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

Outcome of Consultation

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

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DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Darlington Borough Council

Draft Homes Strategy

2025 – 2030

July 2025

Consultation

The Council is undertaking a consultation on a new draft Homes Strategy which will take place from **Thursday 24th July until Friday 5th September 2025**. We would welcome your views on the document by filling in the associated survey which is available here

<https://eu.surveymonkey.com/r/DHS25FM07>

Paper copies of the draft strategy are also available at Darlington Library in Crown Street, Cockerton Library and the Dolphin Centre over the consultation period. Paper copies of the survey are also available at these venues and completed forms can be handed into reception. Alternatively, they can be posted to the planning policy team, Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, DL1 5QT.

If you have any queries or require accessible/alternative versions of the document please contact us at planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk or by calling 01325 406724. .

We look forward to hearing from you.

Foreword

Welcome to the Draft Darlington Homes Strategy 2025 – 2030 which has been published in draft form for public consultation. We're keen to hear your views on the strategy and what is important to you.

This strategy sets the Council's vision to provide high quality homes and ensure access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all. There is a real focus on the building of new affordable homes, with an emphasis on new Council housing and social provision. The strategy sets out the Council's priorities and actions for housing over the next five years, delivering multiple benefits from supporting economic growth, enhancing the health and wellbeing of residents to providing options which allow people to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible.

The strategy is not just about building more homes. The draft strategy provides a framework for the Council and our partners to maintain and improve the quality of housing across the borough. It sets out our responsibilities and statutory duties, linking with other Council policy and ambitions. We aim to improve standards of existing housing, invest in energy efficiency, meet the needs of our ageing population and support those who need additional help to live independently. We have also given consideration to balancing environmental concerns and mitigating climate change.

As a Council we acknowledge that there are challenges in terms of pressure on budgets, rising fuel costs, a national housing crisis, increasing support needs and increasing numbers presenting as homeless. However, we are confident that we can work with our partners to tackle these issues.

Everyone in Darlington should have a secure, affordable place to call home, but this is not something we can provide and manage on our own. We will build on the relationships we already have with partners to achieve this. The new strategy will play an important part of these efforts going forward. Together with those in market house building, the social housing sector, private rented sector and voluntary organisations, we strive to make a positive difference to the lives of residents in our borough.

Cllr Chris McEwan Deputy Leader and Economy Portfolio Holder, and Cllr Matthew Roche Health and Housing Portfolio Holder

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Executive Summary

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

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

Housing Vision

A vision for housing in the borough:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

A vision for housing in the borough:

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

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

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

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

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

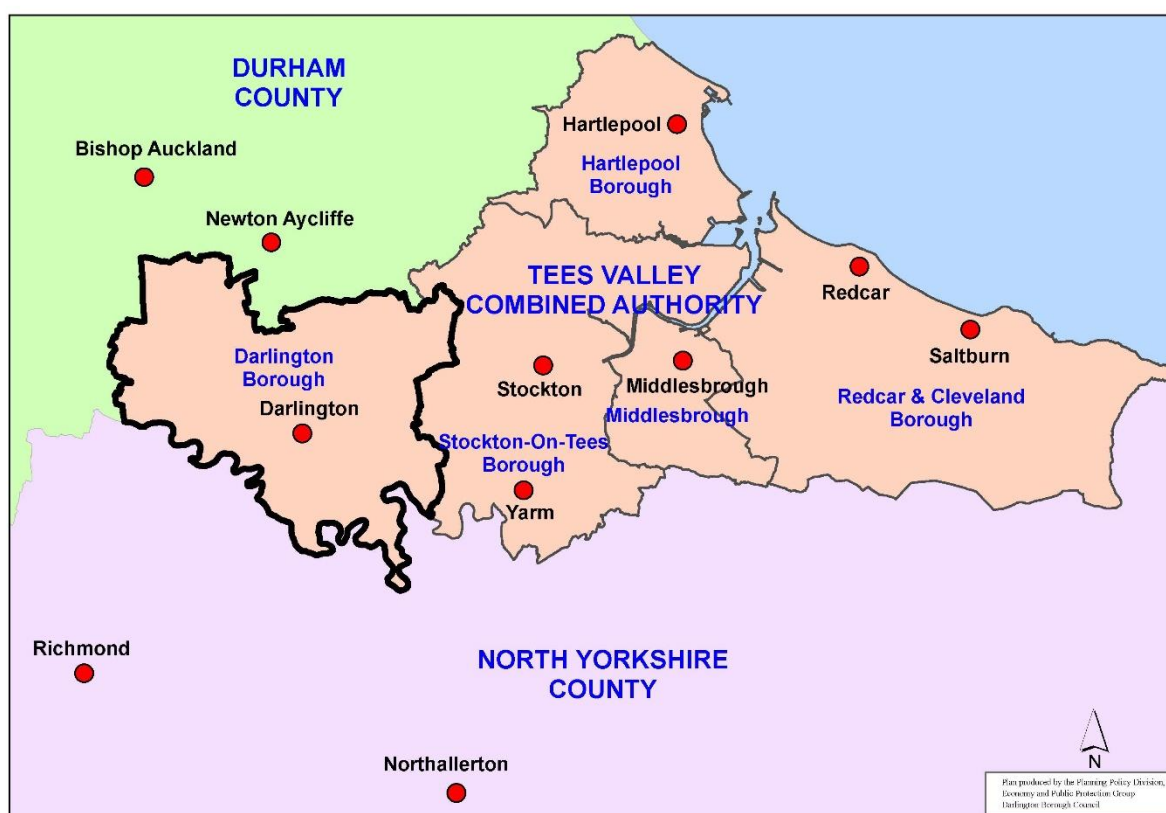
Housing and health are also very much interlinked. We know that the homes and the places in which people live is a key determinant of their overall health and wellbeing. High quality homes with access to open space, sustainable transport links and community facilities can encourage healthy lifestyles.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

Darlington Borough Overview

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

Key Features

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



Demographics

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

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

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

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

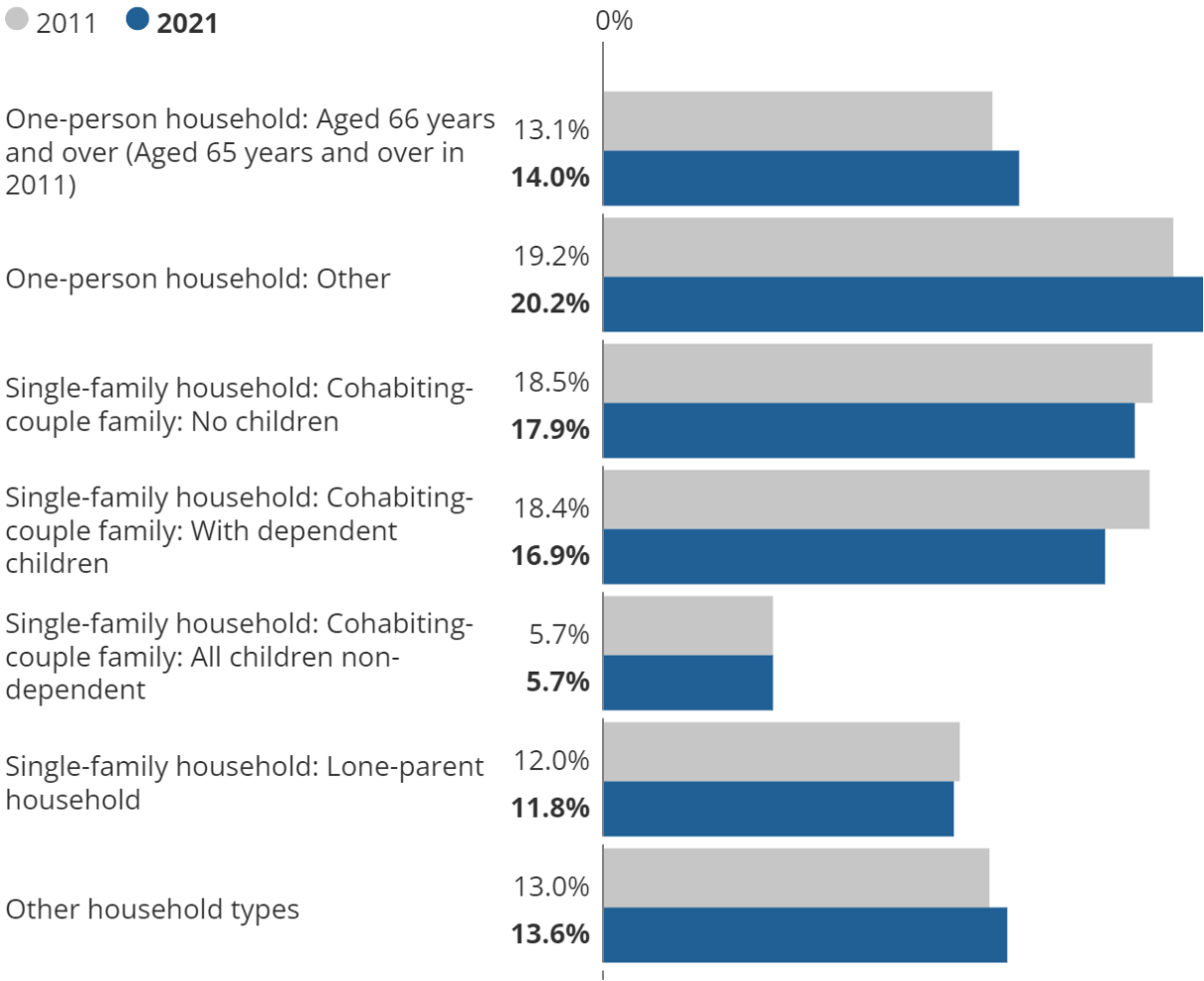
There will be a requirement for some specialist accommodation for older people, however most will wish to remain in their existing homes for as long as possible. This links in with Government social policy to maintain people's independence at home. Household growth will still tend to be driven by younger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

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

2021 Census Data

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

Percentage of households by household composition, **Darlington**



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

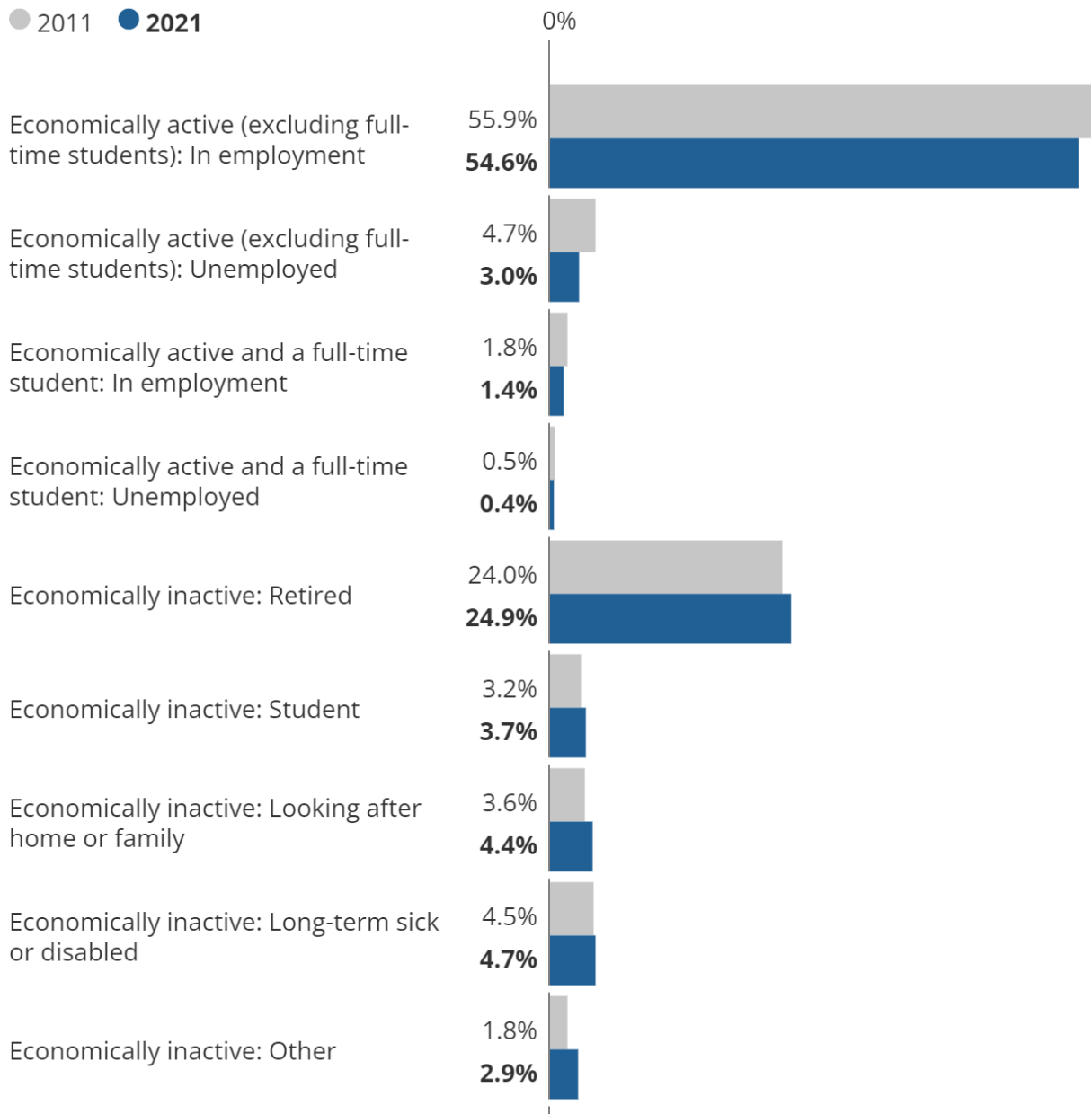
(negative figure implies a households accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required - overcrowded, 0 the accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms and plus figures accommodation has more bedrooms than required – under occupied)

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

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

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

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over by economic activity status,
Darlington



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

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

Other key points

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

ONS house price and earnings data

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

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

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

(ONS 2024)

Local Context

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

Council Plan (2024-27)

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

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

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

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

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

Darlington Local Plan (2016 – 2036)

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

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

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

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

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

Relevant Council Strategies

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

Tees Valley Context

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

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

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

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

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

National Context

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

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

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

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

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

Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

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

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

Social Housing Regulation Act 2024

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

Government Funding

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

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

Recent Achievements

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

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

Achievements have included:

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

Key Challenges

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

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

Key Objectives and Priorities

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

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

Housing Vision

A vision for housing in the borough:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Developing sufficient housing of the right type and in the right places is also important for supporting the local economy. The Council is committed to supporting the economic growth of the

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

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

Ensuring a suitable housing mix

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

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

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

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

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

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

build provision and these will continue to arise as windfall schemes in the future. The Council will however work with developers and landowners to ensure that some plots come forward.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Right to Buy
- Rent to Buy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Helping First Time Buyers

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

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

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

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

Promoting Modern Methods of Construction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What we aim to achieve 2025 - 2030

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

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

Ensuring a suitable housing mix

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

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

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

Helping First Time Buyers

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

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

Promoting Modern Methods of Construction

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

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

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

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

Ensuring high quality homes in the right places

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

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

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

Private Sector Housing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Council Housing Stock

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

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

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

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

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

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

Health Impact Assessments

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

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

Healthy New Towns

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

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

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

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

Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Housing Regeneration and Renewal

Town Centre

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

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

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

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

Town Centre Fringe

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

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

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

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

Bank Top Station

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

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

What we aim to achieve 2025 -2030

Ensuring high quality homes in the right places

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

Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change

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

Housing regeneration and renewal

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

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

Delivering quality retirement living

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

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

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

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

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

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

Council Over 55's accommodation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing

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

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

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

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

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

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

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/homelessness/>

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

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

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

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

Minimising the impacts of welfare reform

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

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

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

What we aim to achieve 2025 -2030

Delivering quality retirement living

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

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

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

Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing

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

Minimising the impacts of welfare reform

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

Appendix 1

Actions: What we aim to achieve 2025 – 2030

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

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

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

Ensuring a suitable housing mix

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

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

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

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

Helping First Time Buyers

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

Promoting Modern Methods of Construction

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

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

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

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

Ensuring high quality homes in the right places

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

Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change

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

Housing regeneration and renewal

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

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

Delivering quality retirement living

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

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

- Adult Social Care to continue to provide support through various means so people can live independently at home.
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Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing

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

Minimising the impacts of welfare reform

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

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**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
04 SEPTEMBER 2025**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE STRATEGY

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the draft joint climate change and nature strategy.

Summary

2. To meet the ambition in the Council motion passed in May 2025 for a nature recovery emergency, combined with the existing climate change emergency, a joint strategy has been produced (Appendix A).
3. This strategy sets out the principles by which both climate change and nature emergencies' action plans will abide.
4. Once the strategy has been approved, a revised climate change action plan and a new nature recovery action plan will be produced.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Members approve the joint strategy.

**Trevor Watson
Executive Director, Economy & Public Protection**

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**CABINET
9 SEPTEMBER 2025**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE RESTORATION STRATEGY

Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio

Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval of the combined Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy (**Appendix A**).

Summary

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

10. The strategy and supporting action plans will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date.

Recommendations

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

Reasons

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

Trevor Watson
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Margaret Enstone: Extension 6229

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

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

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

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

Climate change

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

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

Nature restoration

23. Five principles are set out, which underpin the actions we will take towards our nature restoration commitments:
- (a) Improve the connectivity of habitats through the creation and/or enhancement of wildlife corridors and stepping stones:
 - (i) Identify and map key areas where green corridors can be either enhanced or created.
 - (ii) Where a continuous corridor is not possible, create stepping stones for wildlife.
 - (iii) Update Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013 – 2026 to reflect the current state of Darlington and the need to enhance and create wildlife corridors.
 - (b) Increase the resilience of natural environments:
 - (i) Create and/or enhance wildlife corridors and stepping stones.
 - (ii) Create a range of diverse habitats.
 - (iii) Increase the size and quality of habitats.
 - (c) Halt and reverse biodiversity decline:
 - (i) Deliver targets in Darlington Borough Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

- (ii) Create or restore alternative carbon sinks, such as wildflower meadows, grassland, and freshwater bodies and associated habitats.
 - (d) Ensure all developments in Darlington are designed for nature and climate:
 - (i) Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are the preferred approach to managing surface water runoff from hard surfaces.
 - (ii) Encourage the installation of wildlife features, such as swift, hedgehog and bee bricks, nest boxes and hedgehog highways within the landscaping plans.
 - (e) Review the environmental management practices within the Council's owned land.
24. Separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration.
25. The current climate change action plan is being reviewed. New actions will replace the completed ones and actions that better sit within the nature restoration action plan will move across.
26. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be expanded to also provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
27. The six-monthly climate change progress reports will expand to include reporting on the nature restoration actions, once that action plan has been developed.
28. The action plans are likely to be rolling three to five year plans. These and the strategy will be reviewed regularly to take advantage of updates in government policy, examples of good practice and new technologies.

Financial Implications

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

Legal Implications

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

Estates and Property Advice

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

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

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

Equalities considerations

32. Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. By ensuring that the Council is resilient to the effects of climate change, we ensure that we will be able to continue providing services to all residents.

Consultation

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

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Foreword



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

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

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

But there is hope. And there is opportunity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

Managing the Council's own emissions

Principles for action

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

Managing the Council's nature restoration emergency

Principles for action

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

Methodology

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

Our target

1

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

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

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

Scope

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

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

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

Out of scope

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

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

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

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

Baseline

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

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

Influencing externally

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

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

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

Communication Plan

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

Reporting

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

Governance

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

Existing Governance Arrangements

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

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ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 4 SEPTEMBER 2025

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QTR 4 2024/25

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2024/25 at half year Quarter 4.

Background

2. This report provides performance information in line with an indicator set and scrutiny committee distribution agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently by scrutiny committee chairs.
3. The indicators included in this report are aligned with key priorities. Other indicators may be referenced when appropriate in narrative provided by the relevant assistant directors, when providing the committee with performance updates.
4. 22 indicators are reported to the committee, 18 of them are updated on a six-monthly basis and all 22 annually.
5. One indicator is reported by Culture, three by Planning, five by Economic Growth, two by Human Resources, one by Health & Safety, two by Complaints & Information Governance, four by Housing, one by Legal, and three by Environmental Health.
6. A detailed performance scorecard is attached at **Appendix 1**.
7. Detailed performance with narratives and graphs for each indicator is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Indicator Summaries

8. The following summaries take into consideration what is best performance for each indicator.

2023/24 comparison to 2024/25 at Quarter 4

Culture

9. The weekly average footfall in the town centre increased (CUL 080a – 237,731 to 271,764).

Planning

10. The percentage of major planning applications decided within 13 weeks or within an agreed time increased (ECI 104 – 84.6% to 90.9%).
11. The percentage of non-major planning developments decided within 13 weeks or within agreed time decreased (ECI 105 – 96.1% to 95.3%).
12. The percentage of non-major planning developments decided within 13 weeks or within agreed time over the last 24 months increased (ECI 106 – 94.2% to 95.9%).
13. The number of new homes delivered against annual target increased (ECI 401 359 to 419)

Economic Growth

14. The monthly unemployment claimant count percentage improved (ECI 321 - 4.24% to 4.03%).
15. The economically active rate decreased (ECI 327 – 84.6% to 80.3%).
16. The number of new homes delivered within the year increased (ECI 401 - 173 to 185).
17. The average annual income - Darlington residents has increased (£27,338 to £27,559)
18. The average annual income - Darlington employees has increased (£26,241 to £27,712)

Human Resources

19. The number of working days per full-time equivalent (FTE) lost due to sickness by Council employed staff increased. (FHR 001 – 9.3 to 10.3).
20. The percentage of voluntary leavers increased (FHR 019 – 8.34% to 8.7%).

Health and Safety

21. The number of reportable employee accidents / ill health to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) under the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations increased (FHR 003 - 11 to 14).

Complaints and Information Governance

22. The number of complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman decreased (FHR 008 - 10 to 8).
23. The number of complaints upheld by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) decreased (FHR 009 - 9 to 3).

Housing and Revenues

- 24. The amount of Council Tax arrears collected decreased (HBS 002 - £1,880,721 to £1,848,869).
- 25. The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered decreased (HBS 003 - £543,542 to £453,7169).
- 26. The percentage of Council Tax collected in-year has marginally decreased (HBS 009 – 96.39% to 96.32%).
- 27. The percentage of Business Rates collected in-year increased (HBS 010 – 99.97% to 99.82%).

Procurement

- 28. The percentage of contracted spend as a percentage of total non-salary spend increased was unable to be reported on this occasion following the migration to a new computer system. (LGP 008)

Environmental Health

- 29. The percentage of food premises which are inspected within the year in which they are due increased (REG 301 – 96.6% to 100%).
- 30. The percentage of premises broadly compliant for food hygiene decreased (REG 308 - 99.2% to 97.8%).
- 31. The percentage noise complaints investigated and completed within 6 weeks of the date of receipt increased (REG 312a – 97.75% to 97.84%).

Performance Summary

- 32. When taking into consideration what is best performance for each indicator:
 - a) 11 of the 22 indicators have increased when compared to the previous year.
 - b) 10 of the 22 indicators have decreased when compared to the previous year.
 - c) 1 of the 22 indicators could not be reported.

Recommendation

- 33. It is recommended that performance information provided in this report is reviewed and noted, and relevant queries raised with appropriate Director, Assistant Director or Head of Service.

Trevor Watson
Executive Director –
Economy and Public
Protection

Mike Crawshaw
Head of Culture

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director – Law
and Governance

Anthony Sandys
Assistant Director – Housing
and Revenues

Brett Nielsen
Assistant Director –
Resources

Background Papers

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

Council Plan	<p>This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key priorities</p> <p>ECONOMY - building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.</p> <p>HOMES – affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents</p>
Addressing inequalities	<p>This report supports the promotion of diversity</p> <p>There are no specific indicators on inequalities contained within this report</p>
Tackling Climate Change	<p>There are no specific carbon impact issues in this report.</p> <p>There are no specific indicators on climate change contained within this report</p>
Efficient and effective use of resources	<p>Scrutiny of performance is integral to optimising outcomes.</p> <p>This report has no impact on the Council's Efficiency Programme.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports performance improvement relating to improving the health and wellbeing of residents
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Councils Crime and Disorder responsibilities
Wards Affected	This report supports performance improvement across all Wards
Groups Affected	This report supports performance improvement which benefits all groups
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

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Economy and Resources												APPENDIX 1		
Scrutiny Committee 2024 - 2025 QUARTER 4												Year End data direction of travel		
Indicator	Title	Return Format	Reported	What is best	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025 - Qtr 1	2024/2025 - Qtr 2	2024/2025 - Qtr 3	2024/2025 - Qtr 4	Qtr 4 - 2022/2023 compared to 2021/2022	Qtr 4 - 2023/2024 compared to 2022/2023	Qtr 4 - 2024/2025 compared to 2023/2024
CUL 080a	Town centre footfall weekly average	Number	Monthly	Higher	274,444	251,691	237,731	282,011	292,187	275,439	271,764	↓	↓	↑
ECI 104	% of major planning applications decided within 13 weeks or within agreed time (EoT)	Percentage	Quarterly	Higher	85.7%	85.0%	84.6%	100.0%	100.0%	94.4%	90.9%	↓	↓	↑
ECI 105	% of non major planning development decisions within 8 weeks or within agreed time (EoT)	Percentage	Quarterly	Higher	91.3%	92.4%	96.1%	95.8%	96.2%	96.0%	95.3%	↑	↑	↓
ECI 106	24 months to date % of non major planning development decisions within 8 weeks or within agreed time (EoT)	Percentage	Quarterly	Higher	88.5%	91.8%	94.2%	93.9%	94.4%	94.5%	95.9%	↑	↑	↑
ECI 321	Monthly unemployed claimant count	Percentage	Monthly	Lower	4.57%	4.33%	4.24%	4.12%	4.32%	3.90%	4.03%	↑	↑	↑
ECI 327	Economically active rate	Percentage	Quarterly	Higher	76.4%	80.3%	84.6%	81.8%	79.9%	81.7%	80.3%	↑	↑	↓
ECI 329	Average annual income - Darlington residents	£	Annually	Higher	£24,784	£25,811	£27,338	Annual indicators no data to report for these quarters			£27,559	↑	↑	↑
ECI 330	Average annual income - Darlington employees	£	Annually	Higher	£24,689	£25,155	£26,241				£27,712	↑	↑	↑
ECI 401	New homes delivered against annual target	Number	Quarterly	Higher	511	516	359	85	185	312	419	↑	↓	↑
FHR 001	Number of FTE working days lost due to sickness (excluding schools)	Average Days	Monthly	Lower	8.2	9.6	9.3	2.3	4.8	7.9	10.3	↓	↑	↓
FHR 003	Number of reportable employee accidents / ill health	Number	Quarterly	Lower	12	15	11	5	9	13	14	↓	↑	↓
FHR 008	Number of complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman	Number	Quarterly	Lower	7	6	10	2	4	7	8	↑	↓	↑
FHR 009	Number of complaints upheld by the Information Commissioners Office	Number	Quarterly	Lower	2	6	9	1	2	2	3	↓	↓	↑
FHR 019	Staff turnover - Voluntary Leavers	Percentage	Quarterly	Lower	10.49%	10.00%	8.34%	1.52%	4.24%	5.9%	8.7%	↑	↑	↓
HBS 002	Amount in £s of Council Tax arrears collected	£	Monthly	Higher	£1,546,390	£1,971,156	£1,880,721	£313,952	£884,797	£1,424,817	£1,848,869	↑	↓	↓
HBS 003	Amount in £s of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered	£	Quarterly	Higher	£568,423	£635,633	£543,542	£110,671	£232,668	£341,906	£453,719	↑	↓	↓
HBS 009	% of Council Tax collected in year	Percentage	Monthly	Higher	94.87%	96.09%	96.39%	27.01%	52.78%	78.81%	96.32%	↑	↑	↓
HBS 010	% of Business Rates collected in-year	Percentage	Monthly	Higher	98.08%	99.79%	99.97%	34.42%	58.96%	84.25%	99.82%	↑	↑	↓
LGP 008	Contracted spend as a % of total non-salary spend	Percentage	Quarterly	Higher	85.6%	83.9%	86.0%	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	↓	↑	NA

Economy and ResourcesScrutiny Committee2024 - 2025 QUARTER 4												APPENDIX 1		
												Year End data direction of travel		
Indicator	Title	Return Format	Reported	What is best	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025 - Qtr 1	2024/2025 - Qtr 2	2024/2025 - Qtr 3	2024/2025 - Qtr 4	Qtr 4 - 2022/2023 compared to 2021/2022	Qtr 4 - 2023/2024 compared to 2022/2023	Qtr 4 - 2024/2025 compared to 2023/2024
REG 301	Environmental Health : % of food premises which are inspected within the financial year in which they are due	Percentage	Annually	Higher	43.5%	65.7%	96.6%	Annual indicators no data to report for these quarters			100.0%	↑	↑	↑
REG 308	Environmental Health: % of premises broadly compliant for food hygiene	Percentage	Annually	Higher	98.5%	99.0%	99.2%				97.8%	↑	↑	↓
REG 312a	% of noise complaints investigated and completed within 6 weeks of the date of receipt (except where diary sheet returned)	Percentage	Quarterly	Higher	95.59%	96.83%	97.75%	97.67%	97.69%	97.87%	97.84%	↑	↑	↑
									Better than =	↑		16	15	11
									Not as good as =	↓		6	7	10
									The same as =	↔		0	0	0
									No comparative data	NA		0	0	1
									Total			22	22	22

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 SEPTEMBER 2025

Performance Indicators QTR 4 2024/25

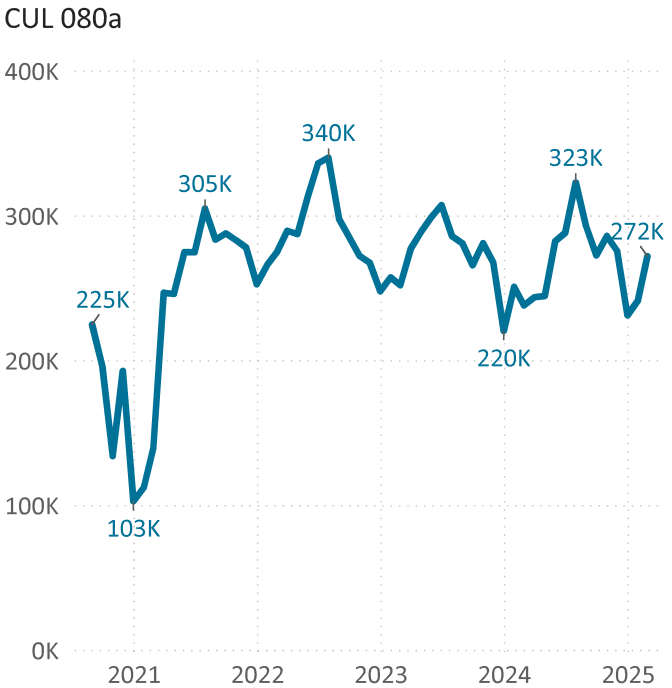
Appendix 2

Town centre footfall weekly average for the month

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

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

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



Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

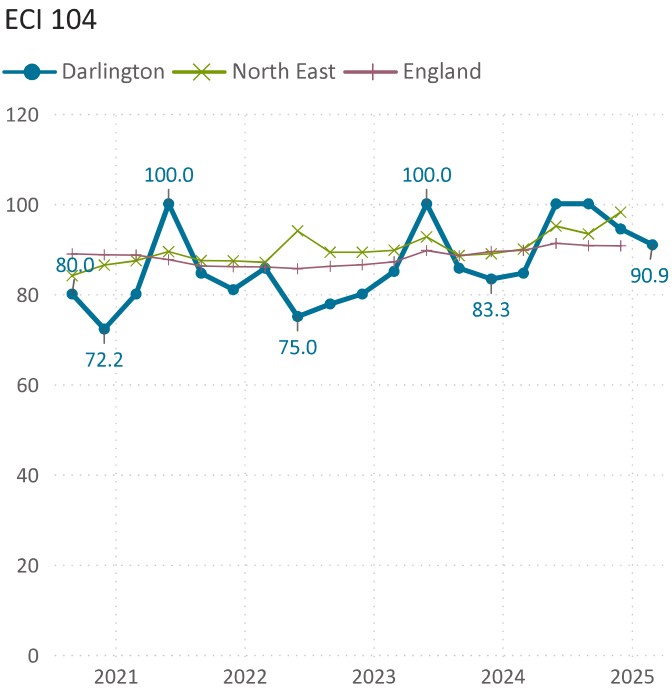
Service Area: Culture

Percentage of major planning applications decided within 13 weeks or within agreed time

The percentage of major planning applications decided within 13 weeks has dropped slightly from the previous quarter result of 94.4% to 90.9%. However, this equates to only one of the total of four major applications decided this quarter.

For the year to date there have been 20 major applications decided within 13 weeks, out of the total of 22.

This represents a slight drop in performance but is still above the latest national performance figures available for England.



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

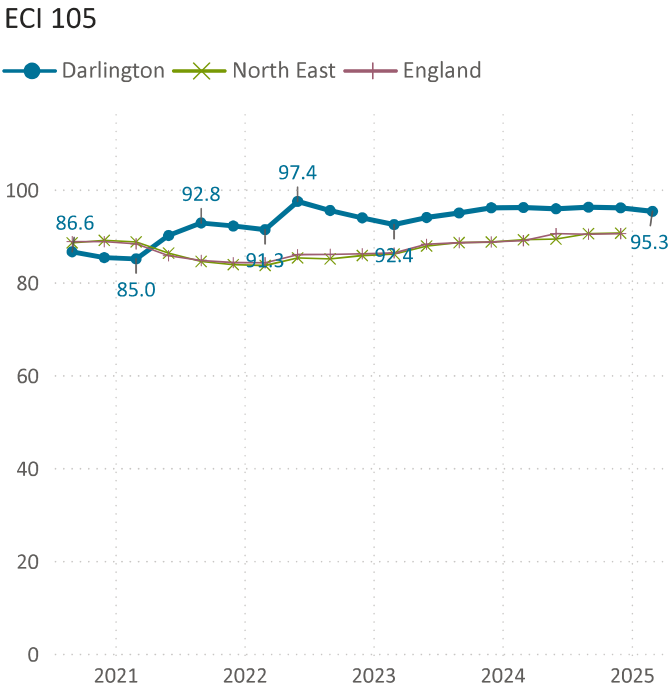
Service Area: Planning

Percentage of non-major planning development decisions within 8 weeks or within agreed time

The percentage of non-major planning applications decided within 8 weeks is 95%, which continues to be above the latest available England average of 90.5% and North East average of 90.6%.

A total of 302 non-major applications were decided within 8 weeks, from the cumulative total of 317.

The department continues to monitor the performance with only five decisions not meeting the deadline.



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

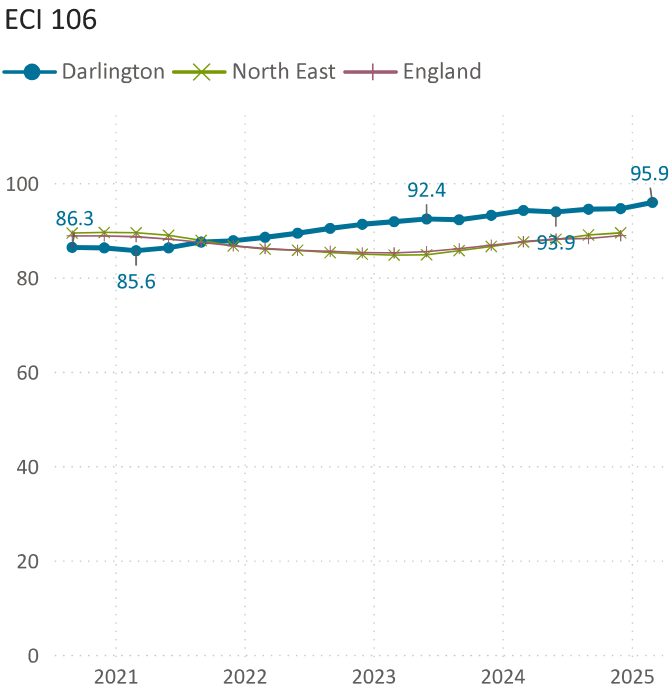
Service Area: Planning

Percentage of non-major planning development decisions within 8 weeks or within agreed time (24 months to date)

The 24 month rolling percentage of non-major planning applications decided within 8 weeks has improved to 95.9%.

Darlington's percentage has been above the England and North East averages since December 2021. The latest averages available show England at 88.8% and the North East at 89.4%.

The 28 applications which were not decided within the target were delayed due to various issues, with some caused by Nutrient Neutrality issues and some by missing Extension of Time targets.

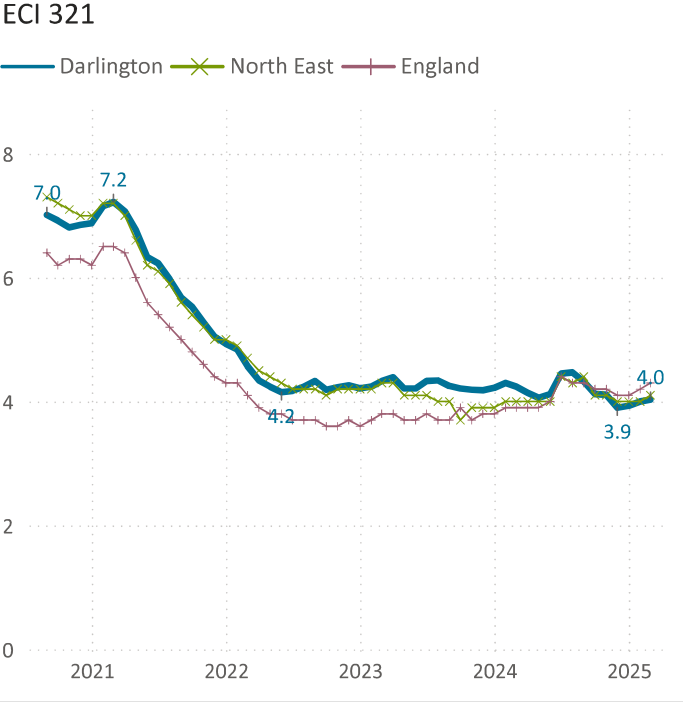


Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Planning

Monthly unemployed claimant count (%)

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



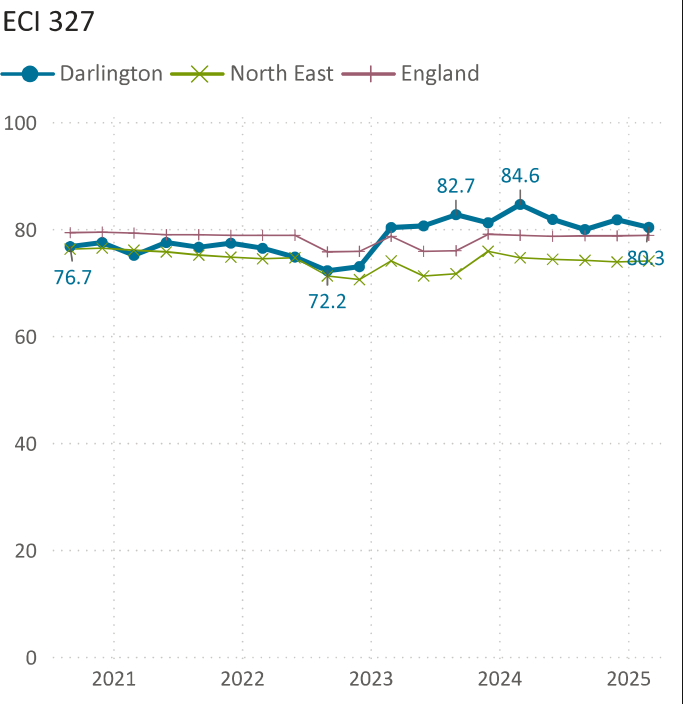
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Economic Growth

Percentage of working age adults who are economically active

The Darlington economically active rate (employed and unemployed) is the same as it was in March 2023. The percentage of working age adults who are economically active in Darlington now stands at 80.3% (March 2025). Meanwhile the rates for both the north east (74.0%) and England (78.8%) remain lower than Darlington.

Working-age economically inactive people have various reasons for not looking for and/or being able to start work. eg students, sickness, caring and family responsibilities and early retirement. Higher economic activity rates are generally influenced by demographic changes and improved labour market conditions.

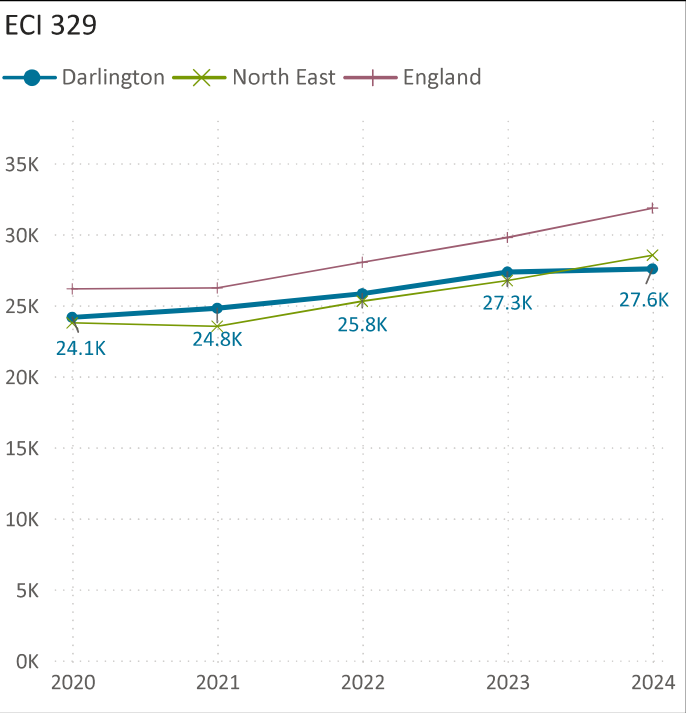


Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Economic Growth

Average (median) annual income: Darlington residents

Darlington residents average (median) annual income has risen for the 6th year in succession to £27,559. This is lower than both the figure for the north east region (£28,526) and the England average £31,840. Between December 2023 and December 2024, Darlington residents average (median) annual income increased by just 1%, a rate that is lower than the England and north east rates of 7% and 6.7% respectively.

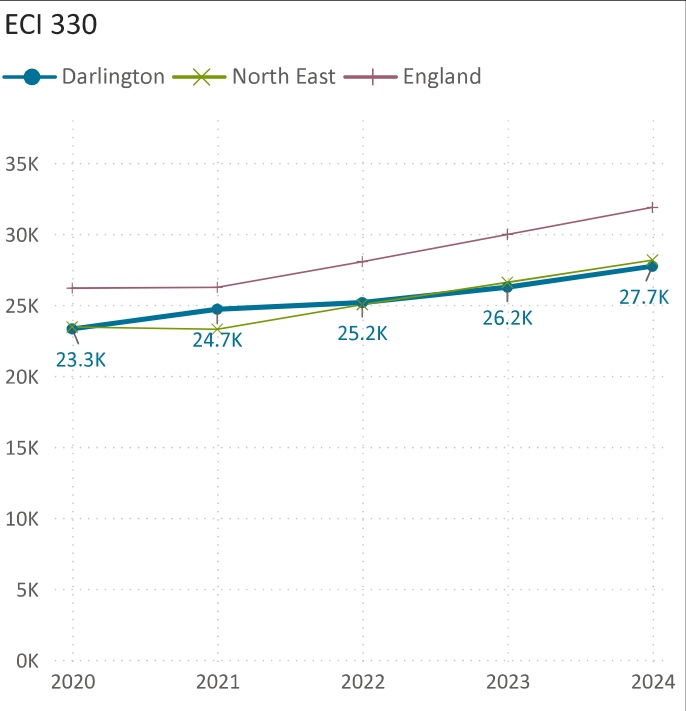


Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Economic Growth

Average (median) annual income: Darlington employees

Employees average annual income in Darlington has increased in 2024 to £27,712 (5.6% increase on 2023) - this represents five years of year on year increases. The income level is similar to the north east average at £28,153, and below the England figure of £31,857. Residents who live in Darlington now have a similar annual average income to those employees who work in the borough.



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

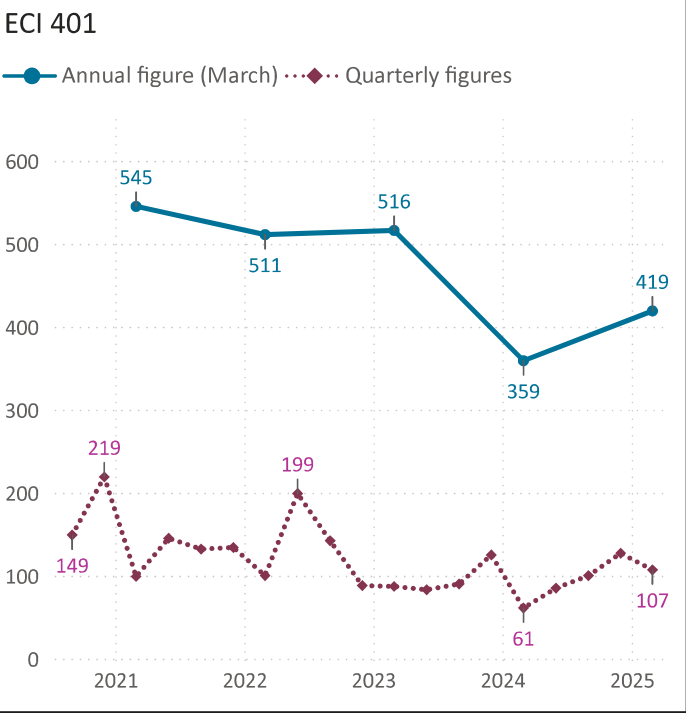
Service Area: Economic Growth

New homes delivered, annually

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

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

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

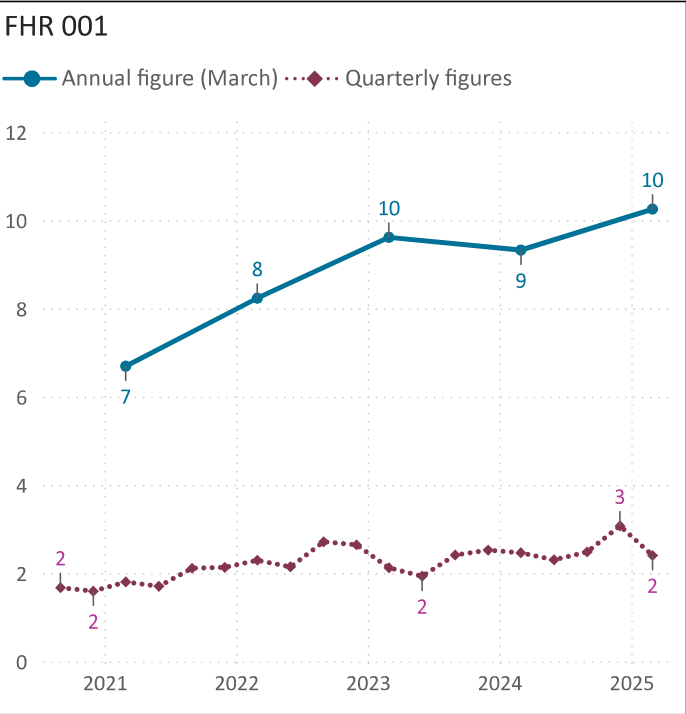


Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Economic Growth

DBC number of working days per FTE lost due to sickness (excluding schools)

The final number of days lost to sickness absence per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) in 2024/25 was 10.24, an increase of 0.92 days per FTE compared to 2023/24, however the final quarter did see an improvement from the previous quarters. Sickness absence continues to be managed through the Council's sickness management policies by managers at all levels with support from officers in Human Resources. The Wellbeing programme and other initiatives, for example the My Journey process, continue to produce benefits to assist with absence across our workforce. We continue to review all aspects of the Wellbeing programme to benefit and support all our employees.



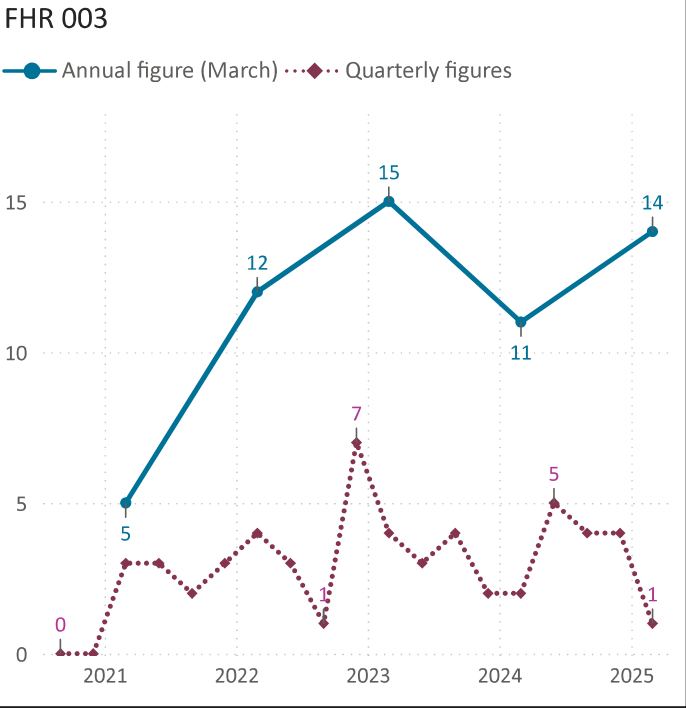
Lead Officer: Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

Service Area: Human Resources

Number of reportable employee accidents / ill health

14 reports were made to the Health and Safety Executive as required by the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulation at Quarter 4 in 2024/25, including two diagnosis of work related occupational disease/ill health.

All accidents and ill health reports are investigated by management and the Health and Safety Team to establish the causes, to identify issues or trends and make recommendations to prevent reoccurrence. Health and safety is a key priority for the Council at all levels and is promoted through all working practices.

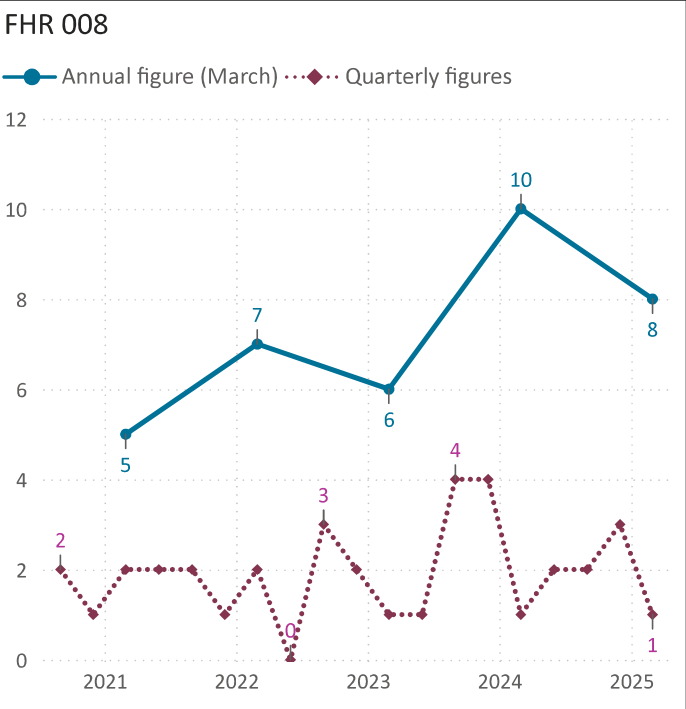


Lead Officer: Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

Service Area: Health & Safety

Number of complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman

The number of complaints upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman decreased to eight from 10 in 2023/24. Three of the complaints upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman related to Adult Services, one to Finance (Adults), one to Lifeline and one to Environmental Protection. The complaints upheld by the Housing Ombudsman related to Tenancy Enforcement. No trends have been identified that would lead the Council to implement additional measures to those identified by the Ombudsmen, and the organisational learning identified as a result of these complaints will assist in ensuring there is not a re-occurrence.

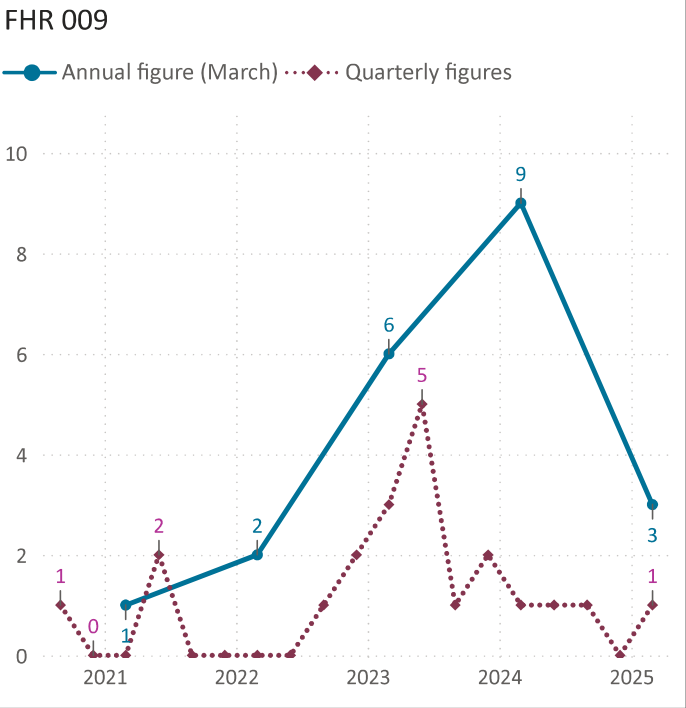


Lead Officer: Amy Wennington: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

Service Area: Complaints & Information Governance

Number of complaints upheld by the Information Commissioner's Office

There was an decrease from nine to three upheld complaints, compared to 2023/24. One of the upheld complaints related to a delay in responding to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, one to a delay in responding to a Subject Access Request (SAR) and one to a data breach in Children's Services; where a protected address was disclosed. Risk of enforcement action from the Information Commissioner' Office (ICO) in relation to delays in responding to SARs remains on the Council's Risk Register, and work is ongoing to reduce that risk.

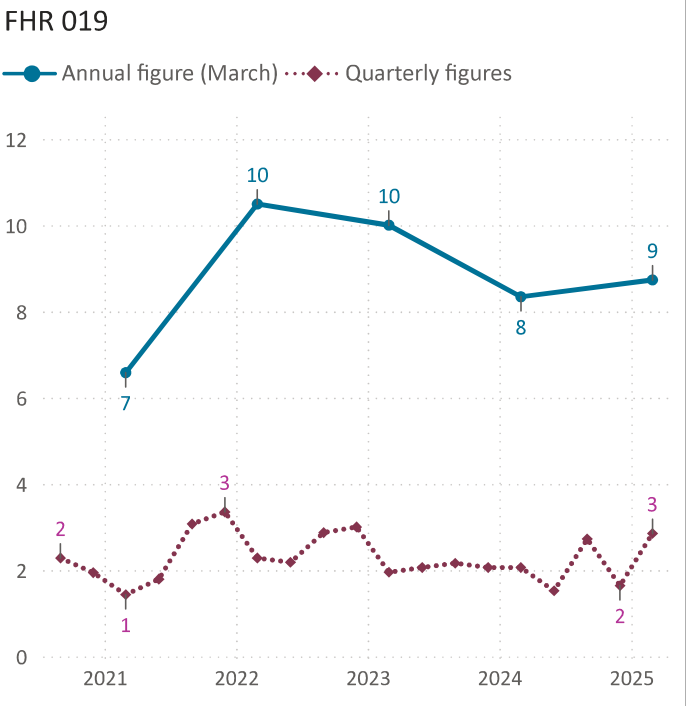


Lead Officer: Amy Wennington: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

Service Area: Complaints & Information Governance

Staff turnover - Voluntary Leavers (Divided by average number of staff in period)

The number of voluntary leavers was higher in 2024/25 than in 2023/24 (187 v 167) equating to an 8.7% turnover rate. Exit surveys and interviews are undertaken to understand why employees leave the Council and to inform improvement and retention where appropriate. Of the completed surveys, 88% of employees stated they would work for the Council again. The My Journey process includes aspirations and succession planning sections, this and other employee benefits / schemes will help our employee offer, to ensure we attract and retain the best talent for all roles across the Council.



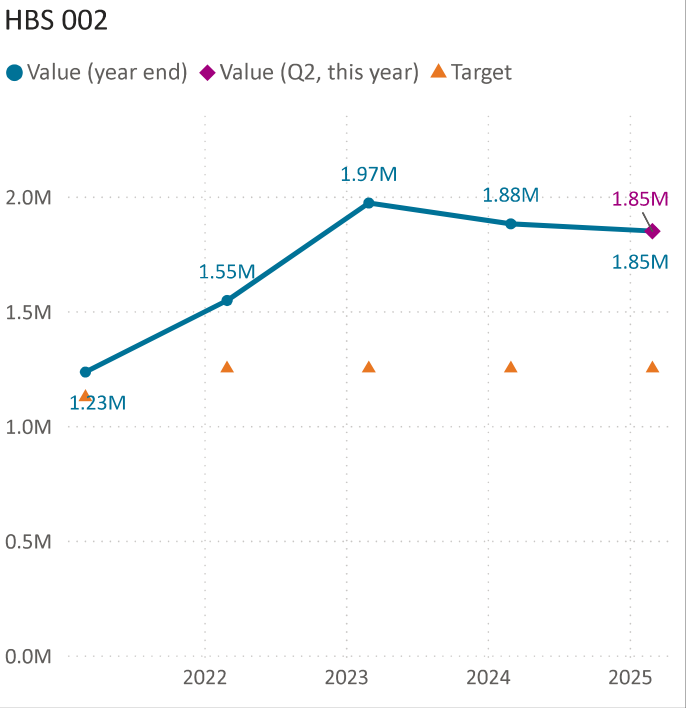
Lead Officer: Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

Service Area: Human Resources

Amount of Council Tax arrears collected (£)

The amount of Council Tax arrears collected in quarter 4 has exceeded the target, with £1.85 million collected in 2024/25 which is comparable to the previous years collection rate.

This is a positive result as the team are still dealing with arrears resulting from the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. The amount of outstanding arrears is £4.4 million at the end of quarter 4 in 2024-25 and all debts are being pursued line with our Recovery Strategy.

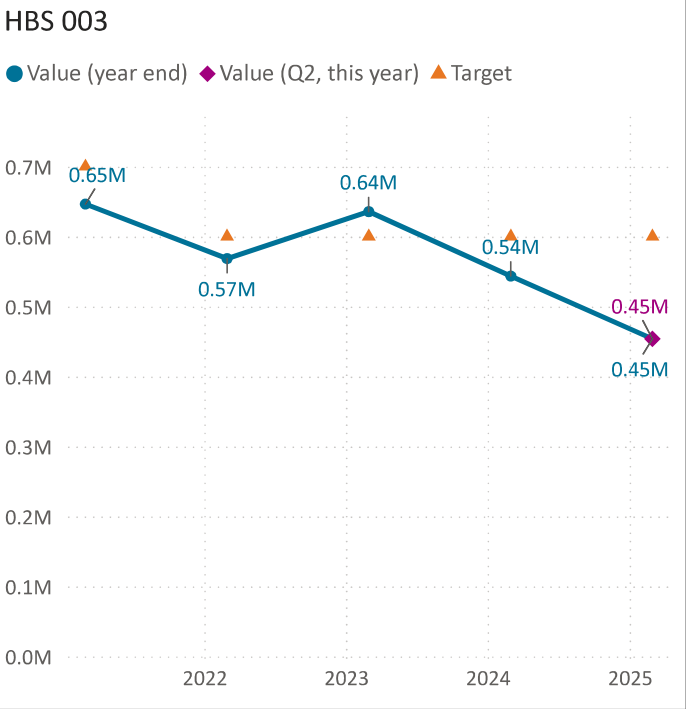


Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Service Area: Housing & Revenue

Amount of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered (£)

The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments collected is reducing each quarter and will continue to do so as Housing Benefit Claimants transfer to the Universal Credits (UC) system. In 2024-25 £454k of overpayments were collected compared to £544k for 2023-24. With the Managed Migration to UC the amount of Housing Benefit overpayments created (and therefore the amount collected) will continue to decrease. Notwithstanding this the collection rates are 106% of the new overpayment debt created (£429k) and the overall outstanding debt of £1.19m is decreasing.

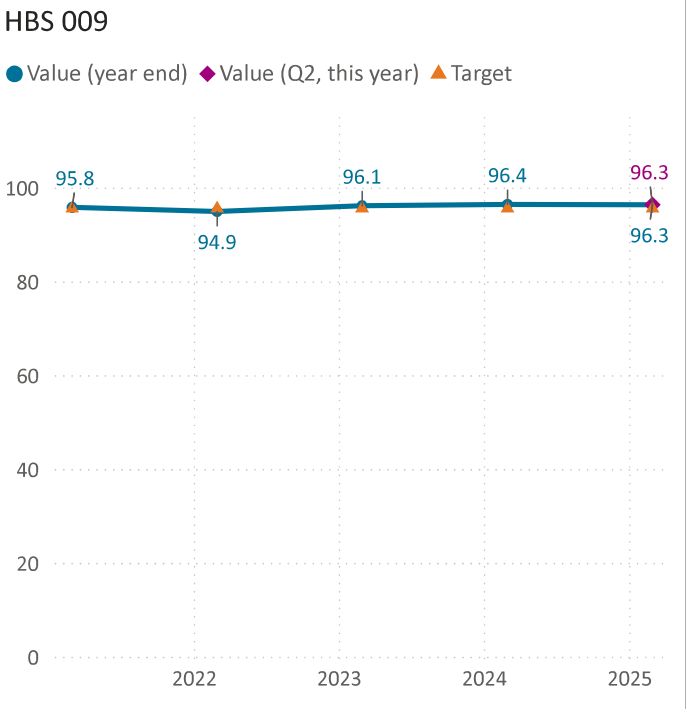


Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Service Area: Housing & Revenue

Percentage of Council Tax collected in-year

The percentage of Council Tax collected in the 2024-25 financial year has exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 96.32% of Council Tax collected which is in line with previous year collection rates. The overall amount collected by quarter 4 in 2024-25 was £77.3 million, an increase of £4.8 million or 6.6% on the 2023-24 collection figure of £72.5 million.

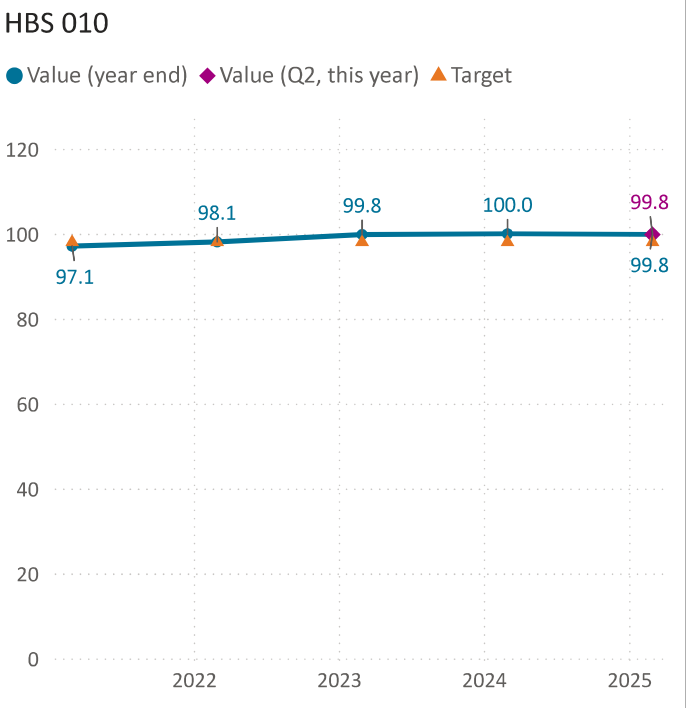


Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Service Area: Housing & Revenue

Percentage of Business Rates collected in-year

The percentage of Business Rates collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 99.82% of Business Rates collected, compared to 99.97% at the end of quarter 4 of 2023-24. Our collection rates for Business Rates continues to be one of the best performers both regionally and nationally. The overall amount collected by quarter 4 was £33.8 million compared to £31.2 million by quarter 4 of 2023-24, an increase of £2.6 million or 8.3%.



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

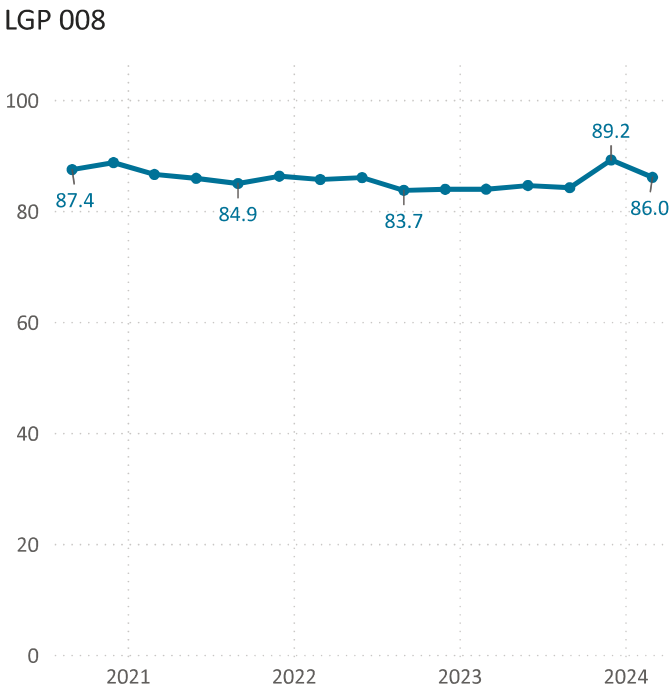
Service Area: Housing & Revenue

Contracted spend as a percentage of total non-salary spend

Following the migration of the Contracts Register to the new E-Tendering system Open, the Procurement section were advised that some of the data was corrupt.

The data has now been updated, but is not showing in the correct format in the Open system. It therefore does not link to the Prospend system as it previously did. The Prospend system collates the data and generates the figures for the performance indicator.

The Procurement section are working with IT and Agresso on generating reports from the clean data. This indicator will be updated to the committee in the report for the Performance Indicators 2025/26 Quarter 2.

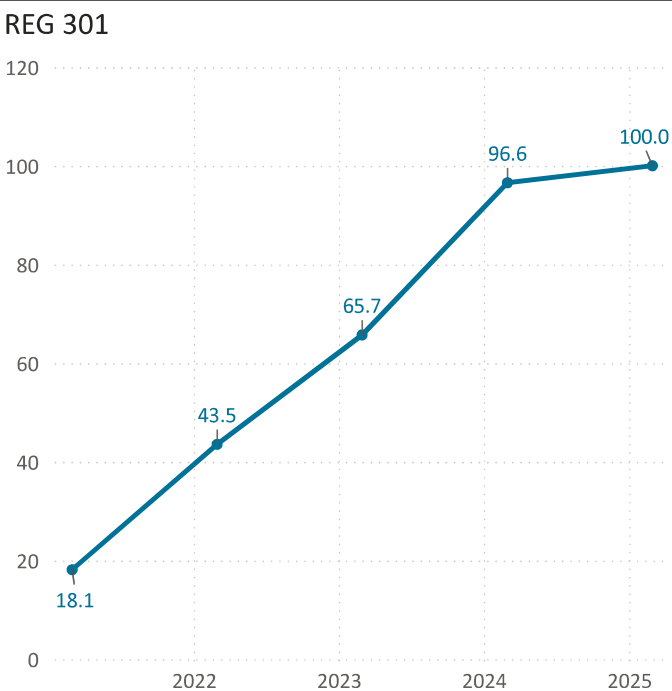


Lead Officer: Amy Wennington: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

Service Area: Procurement

Percentage of food premises which are inspected within the year in which they are due

We are currently on track with food hygiene inspections, however to do this we have been using a contract inspector to help us complete this legal requirement due to a number of historical vacancies in the team. We have finally managed to recruit suitable inspectors but as they are new to the profession they will need a period of training and familiarisation. There is a national shortage of qualified Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and to help with future proofing we have employed a student EHO to mitigate against future shortages.

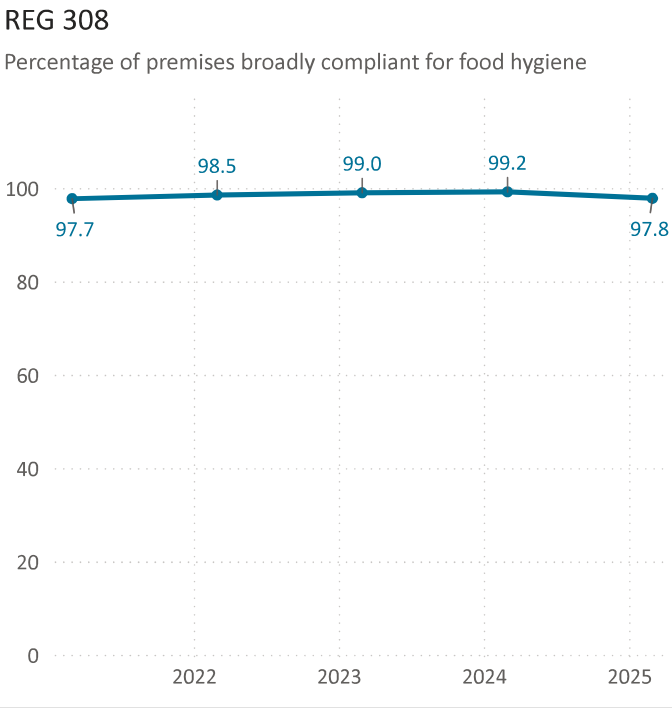


Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Environmental Health

Percentage of premises broadly compliant for food hygiene

Premises within the Borough have shown a consistently high level of compliance year on year. This is due to a robust, consistent, and proportionate advice, inspection, and enforcement regime by officers. Inspectors have worked extremely hard to ensure that standards are maintained. This indicator illustrates the continued high level of compliance of food premises within the Borough of Darlington which is dependant on regular visits by a statutory service.

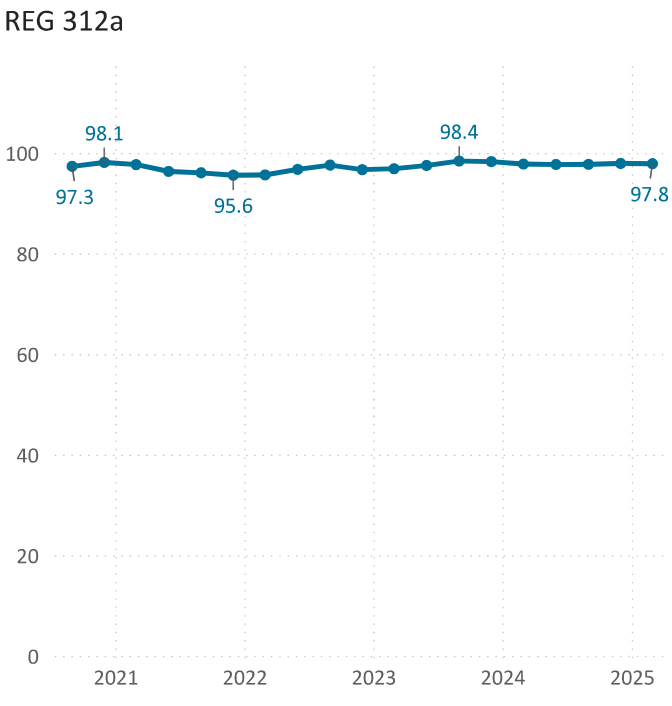


Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Service Area: Environmental Health

Percentage of noise complaints investigated and completed within 6 weeks of the date of receipt (except where diary sheet returned)

Environmental Health continues to consistently meet this performance indicator. The number of noise complaints about barking dogs has risen over recent years and now equates to 40% of all the noise complaints received. Most noise complaints are resolved by giving advice and work is currently being carried out to educate dog owners on how to reduce barking including a recent article in One Darlington and the use of social media.



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

Service Area: Environmental Health

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 04 SEPTEMBER 2025

COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS ANNUAL REPORTS 2024/25

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with the 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports for:
 - Adult Social Care (**Appendix 2**);
 - Children's Social Care (**Appendix 3**);
 - Corporate (**Appendix 4**);
 - Housing (**Appendix 5**); and
 - Public Health (**Appendix 6**).

These reports are due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September 2025 and that report to Cabinet is attached.

Summary

2. It is important that the Council's complaints, compliments and comments procedures are accessible so people can tell us what they think about the services we provide. The Council constantly strives to ensure an organisational culture in which complaints are accepted, owned and resolved as quickly as possible and one in which learning from complaints is used to improve services.
3. During 2024/25 the Council received a total of 747 complaints, 219 compliments and 45 comments were received.
4. A summary table, comparing these figures to previous years, is provided at **Appendix 1**.

Recommendations

- (a) It is recommended that Members consider and discuss the 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director – Resources and Governance

Appendix 1

Total Representations by Year

Type of representation	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Complaints					
Corporate					
Stage 1 complaints	467	463	478	532	457
Direct to Stage 2 complaints	21	14	21	17	24
Direct to Ombudsman	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Total complaints</i>	<i>488</i>	<i>477</i>	<i>499</i>	<i>549</i>	<i>483</i>
Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2	52	70	49	53	26
<i>Total Stage 2 complaints</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>50</i>
Adult Social Care	39	61	54	48	46
Children's Social Care					
Stage 1 complaints	55	65	56	49	37
Direct to Stage 2 complaints	1	1	0	4	0
<i>Total complaints</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>37</i>
Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2	21	14	20	8	7
<i>Total Stage 2 complaints</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>
Stage 3 complaints	4	4	2	1	2
Housing					
Stage 1 complaints	163	140	98	88	60
Direct to Stage 2 complaints	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Total complaints</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>61</i>
Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2	27	30	17	16	12
<i>Total Stage 2 complaints</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>13</i>
Public Health	1	2	2	1	2
Total Complaints	747	746	709	739	629
Compliments					
Corporate	143	130	130	154	209
Adult Social Care	42	39	31	33	38
Children's Social Care	5	6	8	8	15
Housing	29	55	33	21	47
Public Health	0	1	0	1	0
Total Compliments	219	231	202	217	309
Comments					
Corporate	44	77	110	123	171
Adult Social Care	0	0	0	2	1
Children's Social Care	0	0	0	1	0
Housing	0	0	2	1	4
Public Health	1	0	0	0	2
Total Comments	45	77	112	127	178

CABINET
9 SEPTEMBER 2025

COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS ANNUAL REPORTS 2024/25

Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Elizabeth Davison, Executive Director Resources and Governance

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Cabinet with the 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports for:
 - (a) Adult Social Care (**Appendix 2**);
 - (b) Children’s Social Care (**Appendix 3**);
 - (c) Corporate (**Appendix 4**);
 - (d) Housing (**Appendix 5**); and
 - (e) Public Health (**Appendix 6**).

Summary

2. It is important that the Council’s complaints, compliments and comments procedures are accessible so people can tell us what they think about the services we provide. The Council constantly strives to ensure an organisational culture in which complaints are accepted, owned and resolved as quickly as possible and one in which learning from complaints is used to improve services.
3. The Council received a total of 747 complaints during 2024/25, an increase from 746 in 2023/24. Given the Council’s well publicised and accessible complaints procedures, along with its positive complaints handling culture, the comparatively low number of complaints despite the wide range of services provided and the high volume of interactions with residents and visitors demonstrates the quality of our service delivery.
4. The Council received a total of 219 compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from 231 in 2023/24.
5. The Council received a total of 45 comments during 2024/25, a decrease from 77 in 2023/24.
6. A summary table is provided at **Appendix 1**.

7. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.
8. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
9. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.
10. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the new Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which became statutory on 1 April 2024.
11. The production of an annual report in respect of representations received under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is a requirement of the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which the Ombudsman issued as 'advice and guidance' for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) That Cabinet notes the content of the attached reports.
 - (b) That Cabinet endorses the further recommendations made in the Corporate, Children's and Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports.

Reasons

13. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) To make Cabinet aware of the number and nature of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council and the resulting organisational learning.
 - (b) To ensure the Council is:
 - (i) Complying with the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006;
 - (ii) Complying with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code;

- (iii) Complying with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code;
- (iv) Complying with the Council's Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedures; and
- (v) To improve satisfaction with complaints handling.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director Resources and Governance

Background Papers

- (i) 2024/25 Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports for:
 - (1) Adult Social Care (**Appendix 2**);
 - (2) Children's Social Care (**Appendix 3**);
 - (3) Corporate (**Appendix 4**);
 - (4) Housing (**Appendix 5**); and
 - (5) Public Health (**Appendix 6**).
- (ii) The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.
- (iii) The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- (iv) The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.
- (v) The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- (vi) The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

Lee Downey : Extension 5451

Council Plan	Learning from complaints contributes towards the delivery of the priorities in the Plan.
Addressing inequalities	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to addressing inequality.
Tackling Climate Change	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to tackling climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The revised procedures aim to improve the efficiency with which complaints are handled. The recommendations contained within the appended reports aim to reduce risk and improve efficiency in the way we interact with our customers.
Health and Wellbeing	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to the effective delivery and the improved health and well-being of the population of Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to the effective delivery of the Community Safety services.
Wards Affected	All.
Groups Affected	All.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not have a direct impact on the Budget and Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This report does not constitute a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This report does not require an Urgent Decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The purpose of the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report is, in part, to improve the service we provide to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

14. Our aim is to put people first and provide them with the best possible service. To make this aim a reality it is important people have the opportunity to tell us what they think about the services we provide. The Council's Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedures are one way they can do this. They can tell us when we get things wrong so we can put them right. They can also tell us when we get things right, make comments about the things we do and suggest new ways of doing things.
15. We understand that sometimes it is difficult to complain and work hard to ensure an organisational culture in which complaints are seen as a positive means of engagement and an opportunity for the Council to learn and improve services. If people do need to complain we always take their concerns seriously, treat them fairly and with respect and assure them they will not receive a poorer service as a result.
16. Adult Social Care had a particularly positive year, which is worthy of note, seeing a decrease in the overall number of representations made under the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2024/25. There was a significant decrease in the number of complaints received compared to 2023/24. There was an increase in the number of compliments received, while no comments were received. Full details are attached at Appendix 2. Children's Social Care also had a generally positive year seeing a decrease in the overall number of representations made

under the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2024/25. There was a significant decrease in the number of complaints received at Stage 1 of the procedure compared to 2023/24. However, there was an increase in the number of complaints escalated to Stage 2 and the same number of complaints progressed to Stage 3. There was a decrease in the number of compliments received, while no comments were received. Full details are attached at Appendix 3.

18. There was a decrease in the overall number of representations made under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2024/25. There was an increase in the number of complaints received. There was also an increase in the number of compliments received, while there was a significant decrease in the number of comments received. Full details are attached at Appendix 4.
19. While there was a decrease in the number of representations made under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2024/25, there was an increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints received. Although, there was a decrease in the number of Stage 2 complaints received. This increase can in part be attributed to the additional promotional work undertaken by Housing Services to highlight the complaints procedure and the launch of the Housing Ombudsman's Statutory Complaints Handling Code on 1 April 2024. It also reflects a national trend with the Housing Ombudsman reporting an unprecedented 474% increase in complaints between 2019/20 and 2024/25, with complaints about repairs accounting for 45%. There was a significant decrease in the number of compliments received. No comments were received. Full details are attached at Appendix 5.
20. The number of representations made under the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure during 2024/25 remained low. The Council received one complaint in 2024/25. The Council did not receive any compliments and received one comment. Full details are attached at Appendix 6.
21. Some examples of organisational learning resulting from complaints have been extracted from the appended reports and are provided below:

Adult Social Care Complaints:

- (a) It was agreed additional training in relation to recording would be made available for social workers.
- (b) Social workers were reminded that the care providers should receive a copy of the person's Support Plan prior to admission, to ensure they have all relevant information.
- (c) Shortfalls in the effectiveness of the provider's risk assessment and care planning process for falls and moving and handling were identified and it was recommended the provider reflects on the findings and implemented a more effectively risk assessment for falls, which clearly identifies the level of risk and appropriate risk reduction measures.
- (d) The Council agreed to ensure that social work teams do not delay submission of paperwork to the Financial Protection Team.

- (e) The Council issued a guidance note to all relevant staff advising them of the legal duty to ensure, where specific individual circumstances apply, the personal budget covers the cost of support that has been specified in the care plan, not a sum equivalent to the cost of council-run services. The Council also agreed to amend any relevant policies to reflect this.

Children's Social Care Complaints:

- (a) Children's Services considered an urgent update of its Children with Disabilities eligibility criteria document.
- (b) Darlington Borough Council agreed to advise staff providing responses to complaints raised by service users of the need to send the response to the Complaints Team and advise the complainant of their right to progress to stage 2.
- (c) Agreed to reminder to all social workers and team managers of the importance of detailed and timely case recording.
- (d) Children's Services agreed to reminder to all social workers and team managers of the importance of detailed and timely case recording.
- (e) Children's Services agreed to provide an update to social workers and managers regarding their duties and responsibilities under Section 47 of The Children Act 1989, in respect of gathering relevant information and including foster carers where the allegations is against them.

Corporate Complaints:

- (a) Following a complaint for Systems and Information, the Council corrected its website to indicate when maintenance tasks may affect the availability of the public access section of the website, which allows people to view planning applications on-line.
- (b) Following a complaint for Housing Options, the Council made sure officers making decisions on housing applications are clear, that in accordance with the Housing Services Allocations Policy 2023 – 2028, they cannot consider spent convictions as part of the assessment process.
- (c) Following another complaint for Housing Options, it was agreed that in accordance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, the Housing Options service would incorporate the duty to refer into their wider homelessness strategy and joint working arrangements and establish local arrangements with agencies in regard to referrals.
- (d) Following a complaint for Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) staff were reminded of the importance of Adult and Children's Services sharing information. Training was also provided on the Local Authority's duties under the Mental Health Act 1983 and the Children with Disabilities Eligibility Criteria.

- (e) Following a complaint for Inclusion the Vulnerable Pupil Panel Protocol was updated with regard to the Home to Hospital Teaching Service. The Council also reviewed its internal processes to ensure it is able make timely arrangements for the provision of suitable education in accordance with its duties under Section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996.
- (f) Following a complaint for the Dolphin Centre a formalised procedure was implemented to ensure that our pensioner swim price is offered to anyone from outside of Darlington on providing evidence of their eligibility for the concession.
- (g) Following a complaint for Highways Network Management it was agreed the Council would raise awareness of the Customer Standards with officers.

Housing Complaints:

- (a) Following a complaint about the gas servicing process it was agreed the process and letters would be reviewed with a view to improving communication between teams and tenants and ultimately the timeliness in which repairs are completed. It was also agreed to discuss the gas servicing process with the Tenant's Panel and seek their views on what we could have done differently.
 - (b) After receiving a complaint about contractors not being aware of tenant vulnerabilities, staff were reminded to ensure they are updating the Vulnerability User defined Characteristic (UDC) on the internal ICT system so that all staff are aware and to include this information on all orders for contractors where appropriate.
 - (c) Following a complaint about missed issues, staff were reminded of the need to ensure they read and address all aspects of service requests from tenants to ensure they feel listened to fully.
 - (d) Following a complaint about delays in a tenant receiving additional keys, the key-cutting process was reviewed to ensure tenants are aware of the duration to obtain keys and deliver them.
 - (e) After a complaint was received about delays in responding to tenants' queries, staff were reminded to return phone calls within the seven working days outlined in the Customer Standards.
 - (f) Following a complaint about delays to a complaint being logged and subsequently responded to, Housing Income Management were made aware that the Complaints Team need consent from a tenant in order to accept a complaint from a third party. They were reminded that the Housing Services Access to Personal Information form should be completed, but also that the form required updating to ensure it reflected the more stringent consent requirements introduced by UK GDPR and those detailed in our Housing Complaints Procedure.
22. The further recommendations set out in the Children's, Corporate and Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports are:

Children's Social Care Complaints

- (a) Children's Services and the Complaints Manager should work to improve the timeliness and quality of stage 1 responses, ensuring lessons are learned in order to reduce the overall number of complaints received and the number progressing to stages 2 and 3. The Complaints Manager has already ran several in house training sessions for staff required to respond to stage 1 complaints.
- (b) Children's Services and the Complaints Manager should work to performance against stage 2 response timescale.

Corporate Complaints

- (a) The Complaints Manager should provide training for stage 1 responding officers on the updated complaints procedure (introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on 1 April 2024), to improve performance against timescales prior to them being monitored by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from 1 April 2026.
- (b) The Complaints & Information Governance Team should work to improve compliance with the new Stage 2 timescales (introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on 1 April 2024), prior to the Council's performance against them being monitored by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from 1 April 2026.

Housing Complaints

- (a) Housing Services should consider what can be done to reduce complaints about the timeliness and quality of repairs and poor communication and to improve relationships between officers and tenants.
- (b) Housing Services should consider reviewing resources to ensure all stage 1 complaints are responded to within Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales.
- (c) The Complaints & Information Governance Team should consider reviewing resources to ensure all stage 2 complaints are responded to within Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales.

Consultation

- 23. No consultation was required in preparing this report.

Appendix 1

Total Representations by Year

Type of representation	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Complaints					
Corporate					
Stage 1 complaints	467	463	478	532	457
Direct to Stage 2 complaints	21	14	21	17	24
Direct to Ombudsman	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Total complaints</i>	<i>488</i>	<i>477</i>	<i>499</i>	<i>549</i>	<i>483</i>
Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2	52	70	49	53	26
<i>Total Stage 2 complaints</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>50</i>
Adult Social Care	39	61	54	48	46
Children's Social Care					
Stage 1 complaints	55	65	56	49	37
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<i>Total complaints</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>37</i>
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<i>Total Stage 2 complaints</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>
Stage 3 complaints	4	4	2	1	2
Housing					
Stage 1 complaints	163	140	98	88	60
Direct to Stage 2 complaints	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Total complaints</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>61</i>
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Total Complaints	747	746	709	739	629
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Corporate	143	130	130	154	209
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Public Health	0	1	0	1	0
Total Compliments	219	231	202	217	309
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Corporate	44	77	110	123	171
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Children's Social Care	0	0	0	1	0
Housing	0	0	2	1	4
Public Health	1	0	0	0	2
Total Comments	45	77	112	127	178

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DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Adult Social Care

Complaints, Compliments and Comment

Annual Report

2024/25

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Introduction

1. The purpose of this annual report is to inform service users, carers, the public, Council Members and staff of the effectiveness of the Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the procedure).
2. On 1 April 2009 the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 (the regulations) came into force following the consultation 'Making Experiences Count' by the Department of Health. The consultation found that the complaints processes for people receiving both health and social care services were overly complex and inflexible.
3. As a result, the legislation introduced altered the way in which complaints are handled introducing a single joint complaints process for both social care and health services, with one stage as opposed to the previous three stage process used in relation to adult social care services. The regulations also introduced a duty for health and social care services to cooperate.
4. The Council implemented a new procedure on the 1 April 2010 providing a local framework to ensure complaints are handled effectively and in line with the regulations. This procedure was reviewed in April 2025.
5. The procedure aims to:
 - (a) Make it as easy and accessible as possible for service users and their carers to raise complaints;
 - (b) Foster an organisational culture in which complaints are accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently as possible;
 - (c) Ensure high levels of customer satisfaction with complaints handling;
 - (d) Resolve individual issues when they arise and reduce the number of complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman; and
 - (e) Enable the Council to identify topics and trends in relation to adult social care complaints and improve services as a result.
6. The Assistant Director Adult Services is the responsible person for ensuring that the Council complies with the arrangements made under the regulations. They act as the 'Adjudicating Officer', which means they make decisions on complaints and decide what action should be taken in light of the outcome of a complaint.
7. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager (Complaints Manager) is the responsible person for managing the procedure for handling and considering complaints in accordance with the agreements made under the regulations.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (Health Services Ombudsman)

8. Although complainants can refer their complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) from the outset, the LGSCO will not normally investigate until the Council has conducted its own investigation and provided a response. Where it has not been possible for the complaint to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant they may refer the matter to the LGSCO (and the Health Services Ombudsman for some joint complaints).

Information and Accessibility

9. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services, including the complaints procedure. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services, to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
10. Information is available on the Council's website. There is also an electronic form which people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, by email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
11. The Complaints Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Advocacy

12. During 2024/25 the Council commissioned an advocacy service which provides RPRs (Relevant Persons Representatives), IMCAs (Independent Mental Capacity Advocates), IMHAs (Independent Mental Health Act Advocates), Care Act Advocates, Representative Deprivation of Liberty authorised by the Court of Protection (COP10DOLS), general advocacy and advocacy for people with a hearing impairment. This was provided by Darlington association on Disability (DAD).

Summary

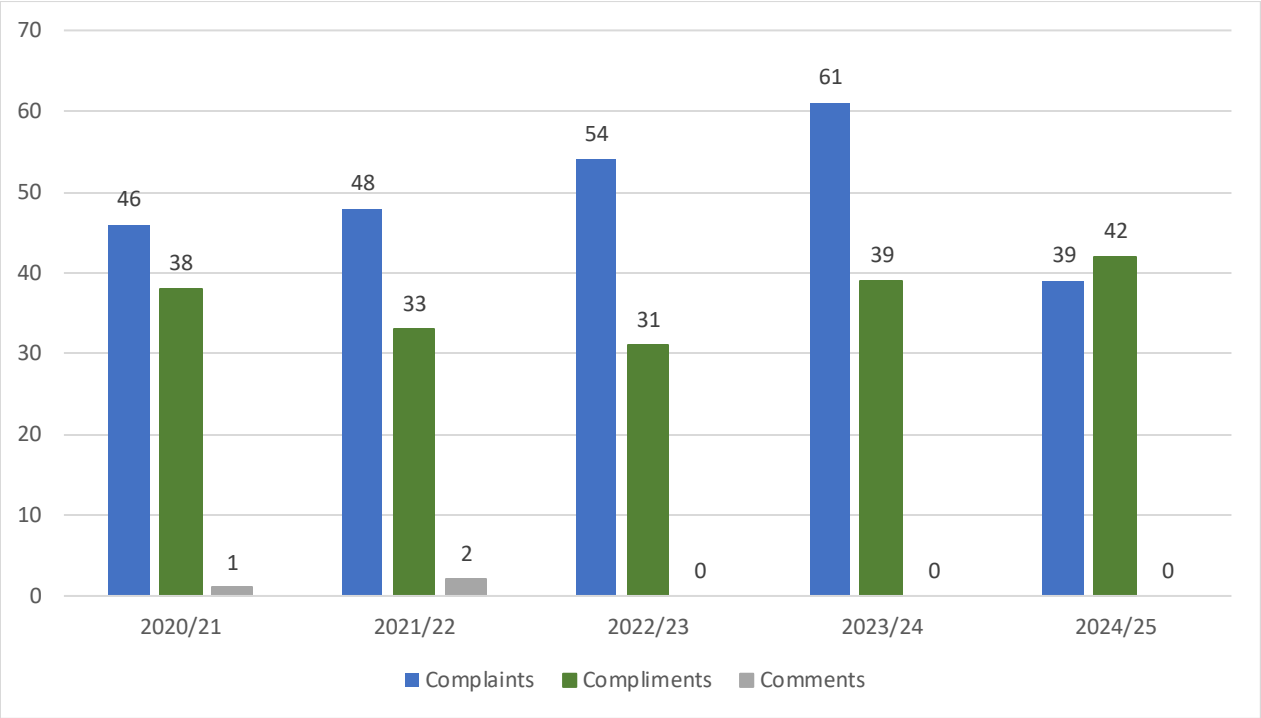
13. There has been a decrease in overall feedback during 2024/25, 84 representations were received compared to 101 in 2023/24 and 86 in 2022/23, although it was an increase on the 83 representations received in 2021/22.
14. The Council received 39 complaints, a significant reduction from 61 complaints in 2023/24. This reduction follows a change to the complaints procedure, whereby Team Managers now usually investigate complaints about their team, rather than having the complaint investigated by someone independent of the service. Following training, staff have reportedly been more responsive, resolving issues at the point of contact, which has reduced the overall number of complaints.
15. The Council received 42 compliments under the procedure during 2024/25, an increase from 39 in 2023/24.
16. The Council did not receive any comments under the procedure during 2024/25, 2023/24, 2022/23, a decrease from two in 2021/22.
17. The Council received three complaints which did not qualify for investigation under the procedure during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24 and 2022/23 and zero in 2021/22.
18. Six adult social care complaints were progressed to the LGSCO during 2024/25, a decrease from 10 in 2023/24 and nine in 2022/23 and an increase from three in 2021/22 and five in 2020/21.
19. The LGSCO reached a decision on seven complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from nine in 2023/24 and 2022/23 and an increase from four in 2021/22 and 2020/21.

Review of the Year

Breakdown of all Representations

20. A total of 84 representations (including three non-qualifying complaints) were handled under the procedure during 2024/25. This does not include those representations responded to directly by social care providers i.e. care homes and home (domiciliary) care providers.

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments Received

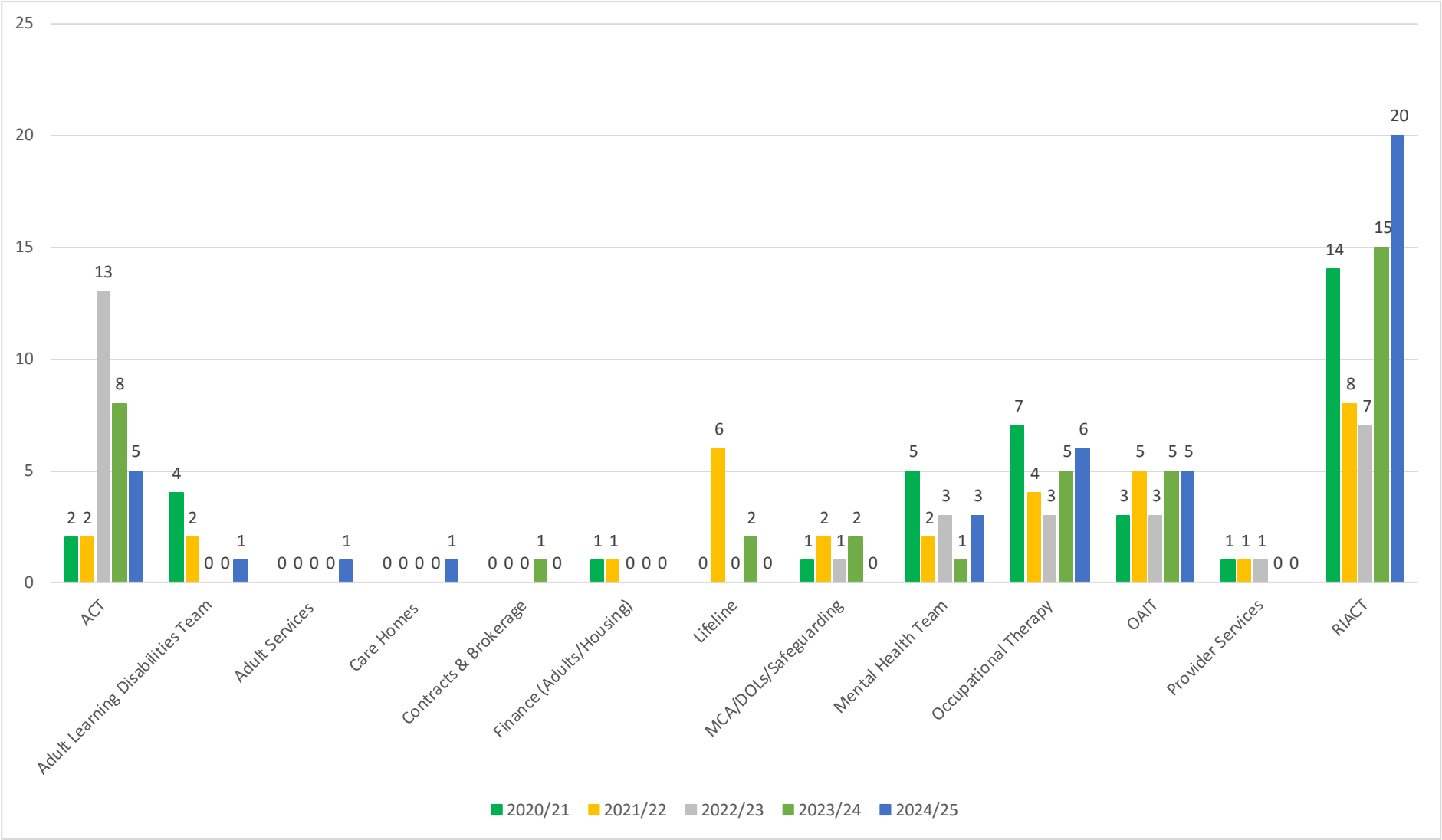


21. There was a significant decrease in the number of complaints investigated, 39 compared to 61 compared in 2023/24, 54 in 2022/23 and 48 in 2021/22.

22. There was an increase in the number of compliments received, 42 compared to 39 in 2023/24, 31 in 2022/23, 33 in 2021/22 and 38 in 2020/21.

23. No comments were received in 2024/25, 2023/24 or 2022/23, a decrease from two 2021/22 and one in 2020/21. The number of comments received has historically remained low.

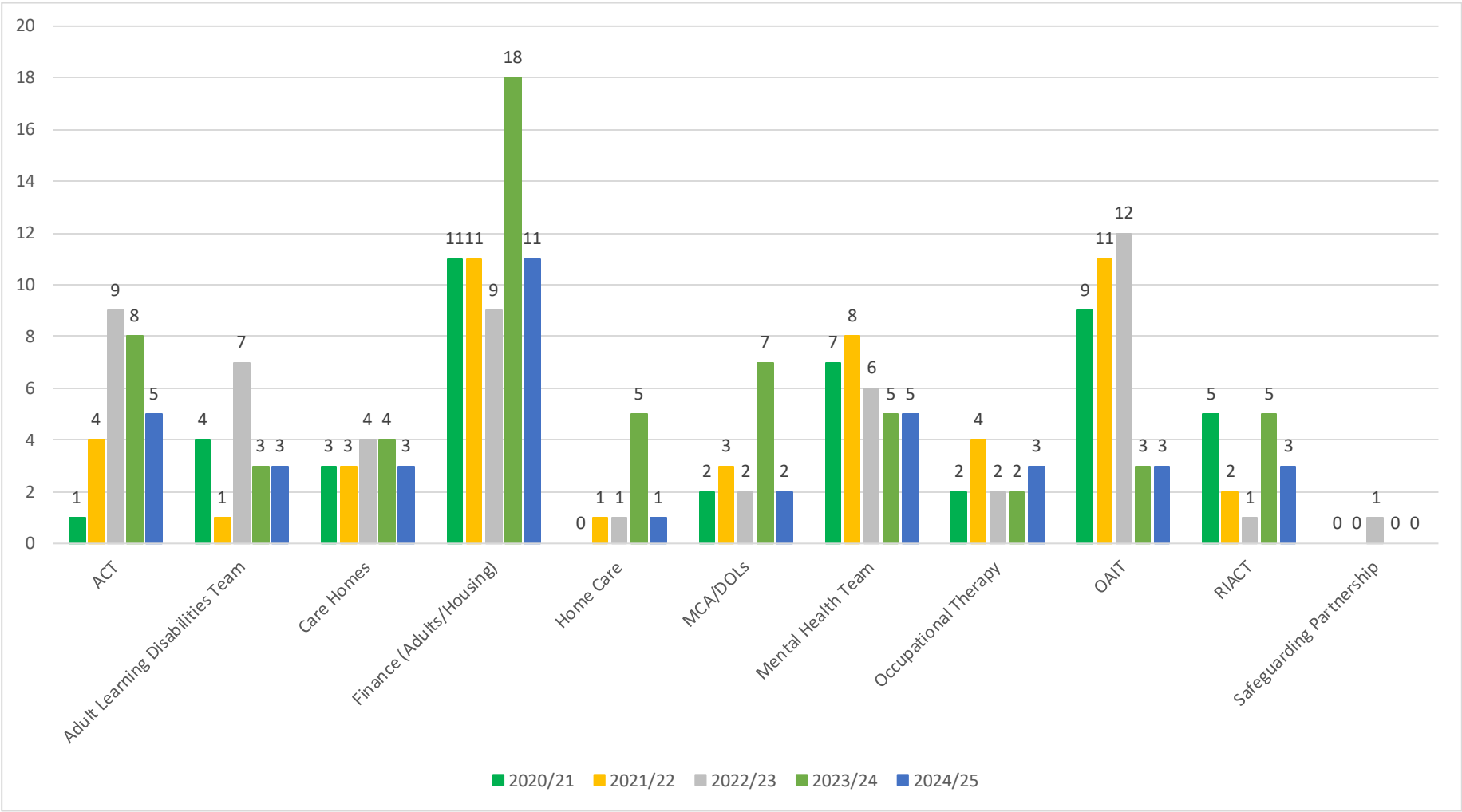
Breakdown of Compliments Received by Service Area/Team



*ACT = Adult Contact Team, MCA/DOLS = Mental Capacity Act/Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, OAiT = Ongoing Assessment and Intervention Team & RIACT = Responsive Integrated Assessment Care Team

N.B. Those teams that do not appear in the graph did not receive any compliments

Breakdown of Complaints Received by Service Area/Team



*ACT = Adult Contact Team, MCA/DOLS = Mental Capacity Act/Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, OAIT = Ongoing Assessment and Intervention Team & RIACT = Responsive Integrated Assessment Care Team.

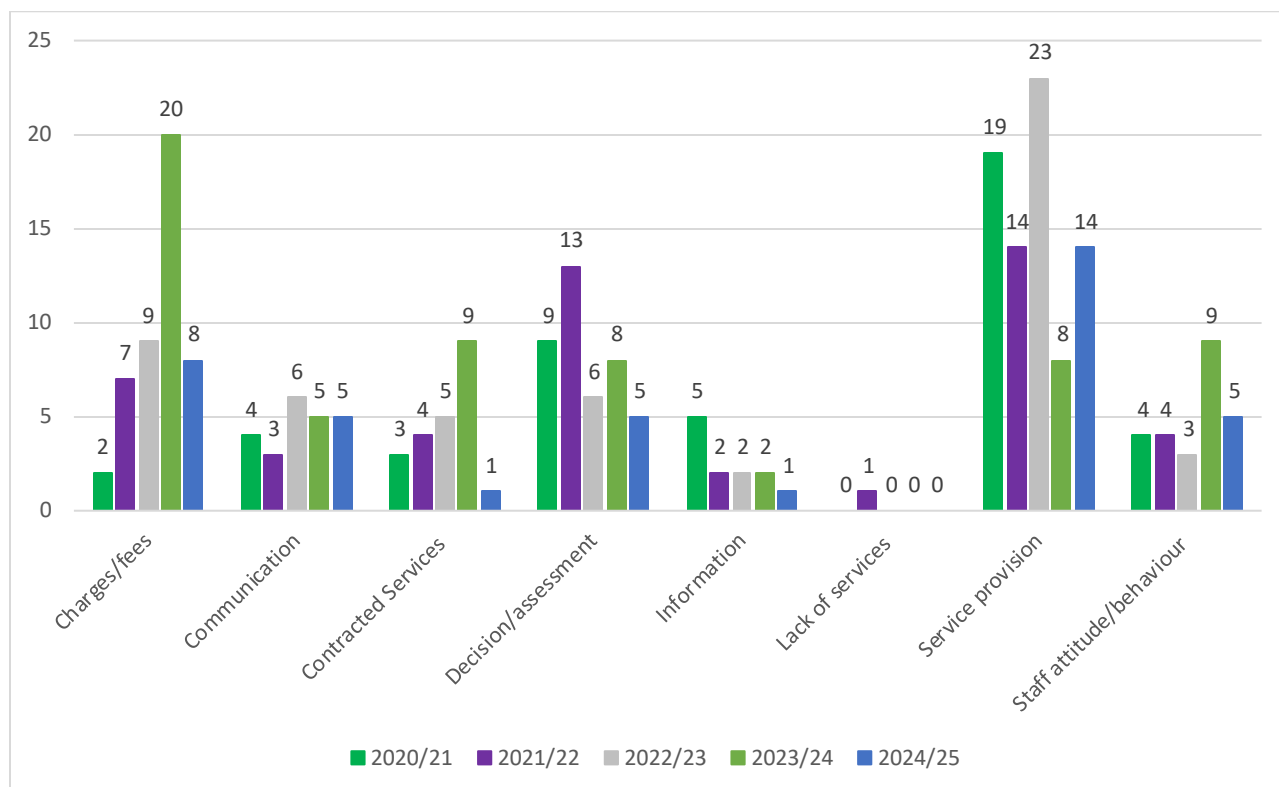
N.B. Those teams that are not listed did not receive any complaints.

24. The Council investigated five complaints about ACT, a decrease from eight in 2023/24, and there were no identifiable themes arising from these complaints.
25. The Council investigated three complaints about the Adult Learning Disabilities Team, the same number as in 2023/24, and there were no identifiable themes arising from these complaints.
26. The Council investigated three complaints about care homes, a decrease from four in 2023/24 and there were no identifiable themes arising from these complaints either.
27. The Council investigated 11 complaints about Finance (Adults/Housing), a decrease from 18 in 2023/24. Complaints concerned people's dissatisfaction with care fees, being asked to pay a top-up for day services, delays and poor communication.
28. The Council investigated one complaint about a home (domiciliary) care provider (contracted service), a decrease from five in 2023/24.
29. The Council investigated two complaints about MCA/DOLS (Mental Capacity Act/Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards), a decrease from seven in 2023/24.
30. The Council investigated five complaints about the Mental Health Team, the same number as in 2023/24. Complaints primarily concerned dissatisfaction with the level of communication and support from social workers.
31. Occupational Therapy received three complaints, an increase from two in 2022/23 and there were no identifiable themes arising from these complaints.
32. Ongoing Assessment & Intervention Team (OAIT) received three complaints, the same number as in 2023/24. Two of the complaints concerned the lack of information provided regarding care charges.
33. Responsive Integrated Assessment Care Team (RIACT) received three complaints, a decrease from five in 2023/24, and there were no identifiable themes arising from these complaints.

Breakdown of Comments Received by Service Area/Team

34. Adult Services did not receive any comments during 2024/25, as was the case in 2023/24 and 2022/23.

Breakdown of Complaints Received by Issue



35. The most common cause of complaint was service provision, overtaking charges/fees. The Council received 14 complaints about this issue, an increase from eight in 2023/24.
36. The second most common cause of complaints was charges/fees. The Council received eight complaints about this issue, a significant decrease from 20 in 2023/24.
37. The joint third most common causes of complaint were communication, decision/assessment and staff attitude/behaviour. The Council received five complaints about communication, the same number as in 2023/24. The Council also received five complaints about decision/assessment, a decrease from eight in 2023/24. Similarly the Council received five complaints about staff attitude/behaviour, a decrease from nine in 2023/24.
38. Contracted services and Information were the least complained about issues. Contracted services received one complaint, a decrease from nine in 2023/24. One complaint was received regarding information, a decrease from two in 2023/24.

Complaint Outcomes

39. 48 complaint investigations were concluded during 2024/25. The outcomes of these complaints are detailed in the chart below.

Service Area/Team	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Inconclusive	Withdrawn	Total
Finance (Adults/Housing)	2	3	5	2	2	14
Mental Health Team	2	0	4	0	1	7
Adult Learning Disabilities 18+	0	1	0	0	0	1
Adult Learning Disability Team	1	0	0	0	0	1
MCA/DOLS	1	5	2	0	0	8
Adult Contact Team	0	2	2	0	1	5
Ongoing Assessment & Intervention Team (OAIT)	0	0	0	0	1	1
Occupational Therapy	1	1	1	0	2	5
RIACT	0	3	0	0	0	3
Care Homes	1	1	0	0	0	2
Home Care	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	9	16	14	2	7	48

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaints Received 2024/25

40. Six adult social care complaints were progressed to the LGSCO during 2024/25, a decrease from ten in 2023/24.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Outcomes 2024/25

41. Seven adult social care complaints were determined by the LGSCO during 2024/25, a decrease from nine in 2023/24.
42. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Organisational Learning

43. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2024/25, some of which are detailed below.

Adult Contact Team (ACT)

44. It was agreed additional training in relation to recording would be made available for social workers.

Adult Learning Disabilities 18+

45. It was agreed future respite arrangements should be clearly documented in meetings and correspondence and issues on finding appropriate respite provision clearly communicated.

Care homes (Contracted Services)

46. Following a complaint about a Care Home it was recommended the environmental risk assessment be reviewed to ensure that the tethering used for furniture continues to be fit for purpose. It was also agreed the issue of missing dentures for all care homes would be raised at the Council's Residential Provider Forum – to look at good practice and that Oral Health Promotion from County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) would be invited. Furthermore, it was recommended staff undergo refresher training with respect to recording of information on incident reports and in case notes.
47. As a result of another complaint social workers were reminded that the care providers should receive a copy of the person's Support Plan prior to admission, to ensure they have all relevant information. This investigation highlighted shortfalls in the effectiveness of the provider's risk assessment and care planning process for falls and moving and handling. It was recommend the provider reflects on the findings and implemented a more effectively risk assessment for falls, which clearly identifies the level of risk and appropriate risk reduction measures. It was also agreed the provider would ensure they have a suitable process for new admissions to ensure they have appropriate walking aids in place. It was recommended the provider review their dependency assessment tool to ensure they have appropriate staffing levels to be able to meet residents needs at any given time and that where a resident is at risk of falls, appropriate interventions should be considered straight away as part of the risk assessment and care planning process.

Finance

48. The Council agreed to ensure that social work teams do not delay submission of paperwork to the Financial Protection Team.
49. Social workers were also reminded to request a financial assessment in a timely manner.
50. The Council issued a guidance note to all relevant staff advising them of the legal duty to ensure, where specific individual circumstances apply, the personal budget covers the cost of support that has been specified in the care plan, not a sum equivalent to the cost of council-run services. The Council also agreed to amend any relevant policies to reflect this.

Home Care

51. It was agreed that where services are provided that do not correspond to those set out in the Support Plan, a review of the individual's needs would be requested in a timely

manner. During the investigation the provider identified the following areas of improvement:

- Recording practices to be improved to ensure that all tasks are recorded correctly and in detail and that the Team Leader and Senior oversee the recording.
- Team Leaders/Seniors to request reviews when someone's care package changes if the change is consistent after 4 weeks.
- A traffic light system is to be set up so the provider can identify quickly whose needs are increasing/decreasing and who needs a review (Registered Service Manager to oversee).

MCA/DOLS

52. It was agreed a continued professional development session would be completed with the Safeguarding Adults Team in respect of involving adults alleged to have caused harm in safeguarding enquires.

Responsive Integrated Assessment Care Team (RIACT)

53. It was agreed social workers would fully explain brokerage process in relation to sourcing care providers and clearly document this in the case notes. It was also agreed social workers within all teams would explore direct payments when an individual's preferred choice is to pick a specific care provider and that the RIACT Team Manager would ensure at point of discharge planning from care homes that clear plans are in place and agreed by all parties. It was agreed that safeguarding minutes where possible would be sent out in a timely manner and prior to any review meetings and that should the minutes be unable to be sent out the chair of the subsequent meeting would recap the previous strategy and any outstanding actions.

Performance against the Procedure

54. The target for acknowledging receipt of complaints under the procedure is 3 working days.
55. 87.80% of complaints received during 2024/25 were acknowledged within the 3 working day timescale, an increase from 80% in 2023/24.
56. There are no longer any statutory timescales for complaint responses, except that complainants should receive a response within the 'relevant period' i.e. six months or longer where an extension is agreed in advance. Where the Local Authority is unable to respond within the relevant period it must write to the complainant explaining why and respond as soon as reasonably practicable after the relevant period. The procedure sets out a 40 working days timescale for dealing with complaints solely about the Council's services, although the investigator may agree an extension with the complainant up to a maximum of six months. It also states that for joint health and social care complaints, the complaints managers from the different organisations will work together to decide a reasonable timescale and agree this with the complainant. This is to ensure investigations are completed in a timely manner and within the maximum time allowed in the regulations.

57. 21.43% of complaints were responded to within 40 working days, an increase from 7.14% respond to within 30 working days in 2023/24.
58. 14.58% of complaints exceeded the maximum six month time limit set in the procedure, an increase from 10.7% in 2023/24. The majority of these complaints were for Finance (Adults/Housing).

Performance Indicator for 2024/25

59. In relation to Adult Social Care complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of upheld decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Adult Services received four upheld decisions during 2024/25, as was the case in 2023/24.
60. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Further recommendations

61. Finance (Adults/Housing) should work to reduce the number of complaints that exceeded the maximum six month time limit set in the regulations.



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

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Introduction

1. Darlington Children's Social Care welcomes complaints, compliments and comments as a way of improving service delivery to children, young people and their families. The purpose of this report is to inform the service users, carers, the public, Council Members and Children's Social Care staff of the effectiveness of the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the Procedure). The report identifies topics and trends in relation to complaints information, makes suggestions for service improvements, where appropriate and identifies areas of organisational learning that have taken place in relation to people, policy and process.

The Law

2. The Council is required by law to have management arrangements in place for considering children's social care representations, including complaints, under the Children Act 1989. National legislative procedures for social care were amended in September 2006 with the introduction of the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 (the Regulations). It is a requirement of the Regulations that the Council publishes an annual report. In addition to the Regulations the Department for Education and Skills produced some comprehensive guidance for local authorities on managing complaints, called 'Getting the Best from Complaints'.
3. Key features of the Regulations include:
 - (a) A requirement for local authorities to appoint a Complaints Manager;
 - (b) A requirement for review panels to be retained by local authorities but with more robust arrangements for constituting and running them; and
 - (c) A 12 month time limit to make complaints.

Complaints and Information Governance Team

4. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager is appointed as the 'Complaints Manager' in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations. The Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team is independent of Children's Social Care operational line management. This ensures a high level of independence in the way children's social care complaints are managed within the Council.

Public Information

5. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services, including the Procedure. To help make the Procedure easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.

6. Information is available on the Council's website. There is also an electronic form which people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish.
7. This can be in writing, by email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
8. The Complaints Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Children's Services Social Care Complaints Process

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

9. This initial stage allows children's social care managers the opportunity to try and resolve complaints locally, usually within the team being complained about.

Stage 2 – Investigation

10. Stage 2 involves a full and formal investigation. An 'Independent Person' must also be appointed to oversee the investigation and report independently to Children's Social Care Services. Both the Investigating Officer and Independent Person produce reports, which are submitted to a senior manager who writes the final response to the complainant.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

11. A review panel is convened when the complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response. The panel consists of an independent chairperson and two individuals who are independent of the Council.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

12. Although complainants can refer complaints at any stage to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) they will not normally investigate until the Council has conducted its own investigation and provided a response.

External Support to the Complaints Process

Advocacy

13. The Council commissions an advocacy service for children and young people who make a complaint. This is an independent service provided by NYAS.

Investigating Officers

14. While the Regulations do not require investigating officers to be independent of the Council, we have signed up to a contract for the provision of independent investigating officers.

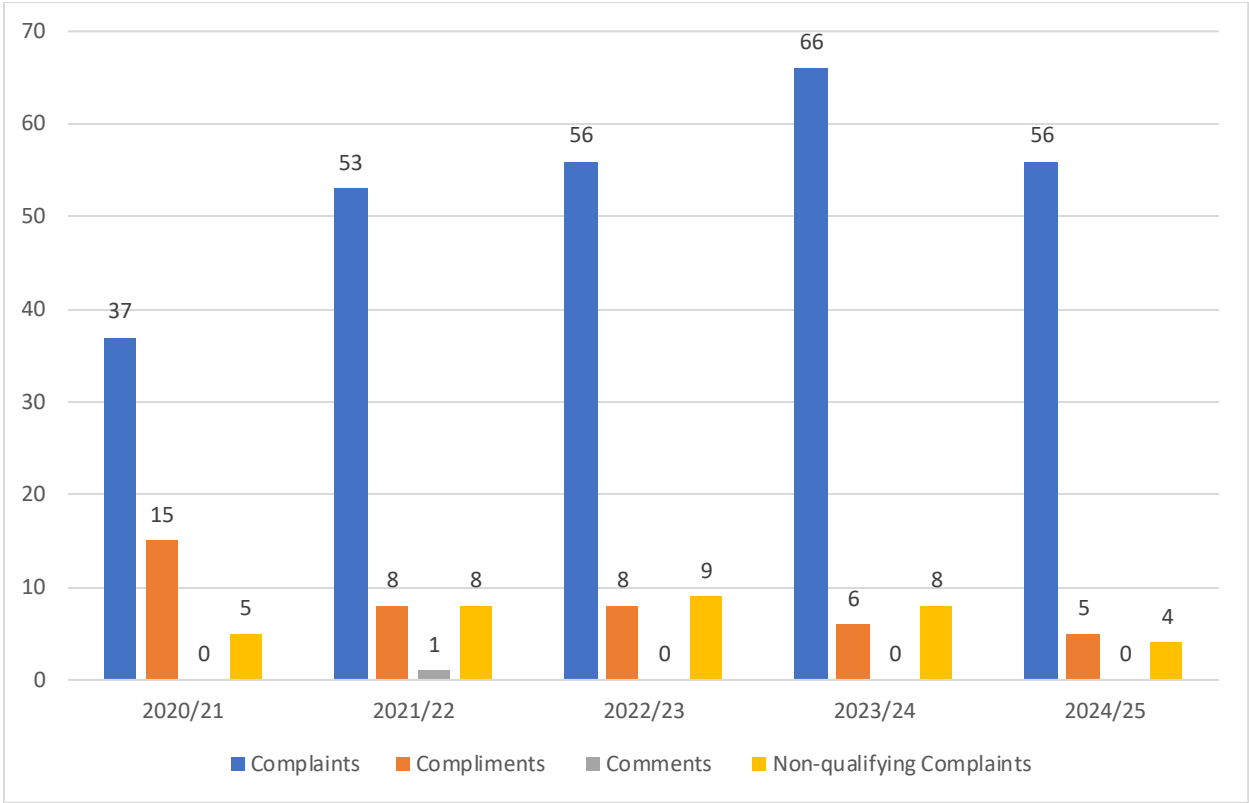
Independent Persons

15. The Council has signed up to a contract for the provision of independent persons.

Review Panels

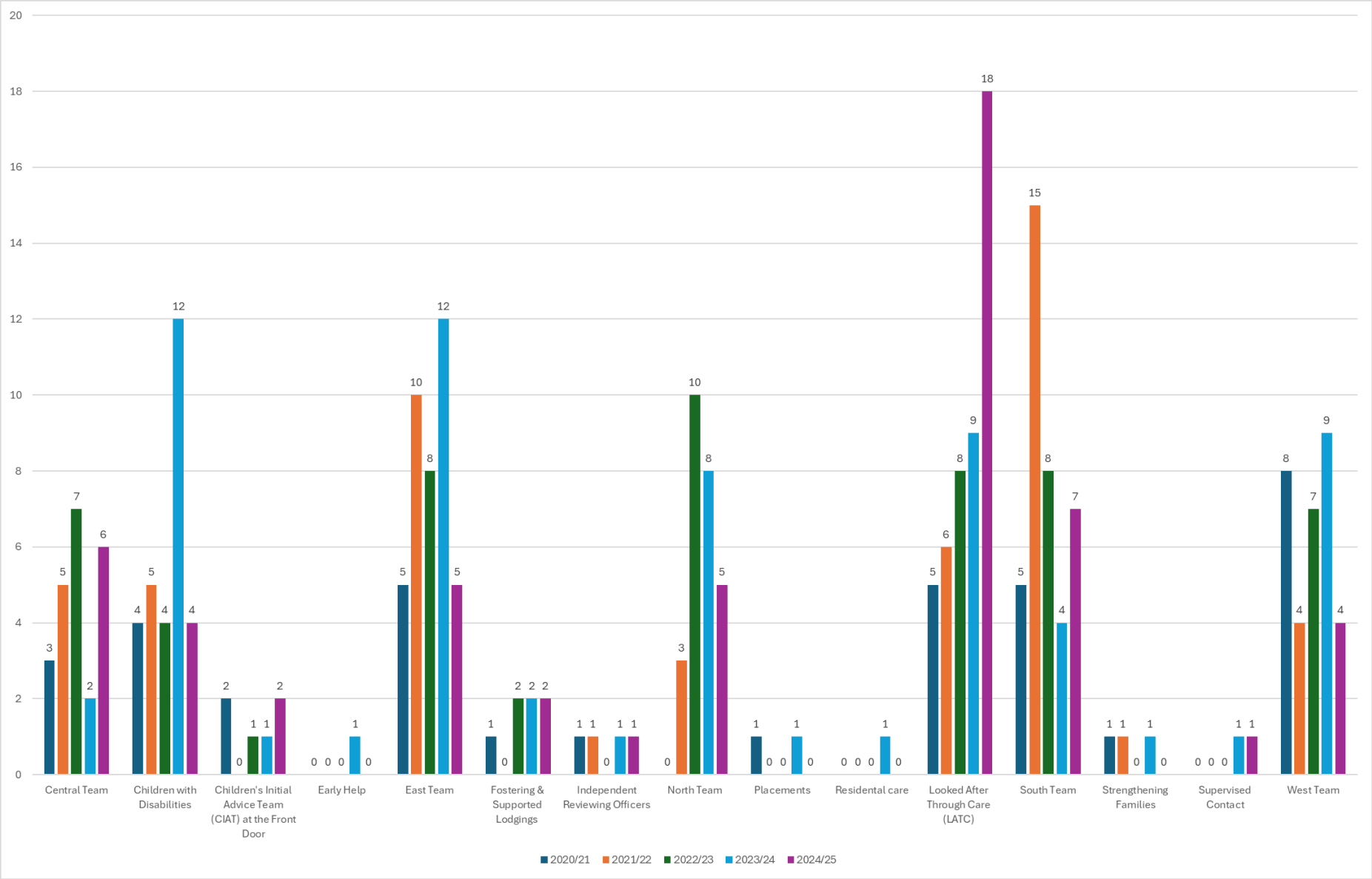
16. The Council has also signed up to a contract for the provision of an independent chair and independent panellist service.

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments received



- 17. The Council saw a significant decrease in the number of complaints received, 56 compared to 66 in 2023/34. While 55 were investigated at stage 1, one was escalated directly to stage 2. This was the same number of complaints that were received in 2022/23.
- 18. The Council received five compliments, a decrease from six in 2023/24.
- 19. The Council did not receive any comments in 2024/25, 2023/24 or 2022/23.
- 20. The Council received four non-qualifying complaints, a decrease from eight in 2023/24.

Breakdown of Stage 1 Complaints by Service Area/Team

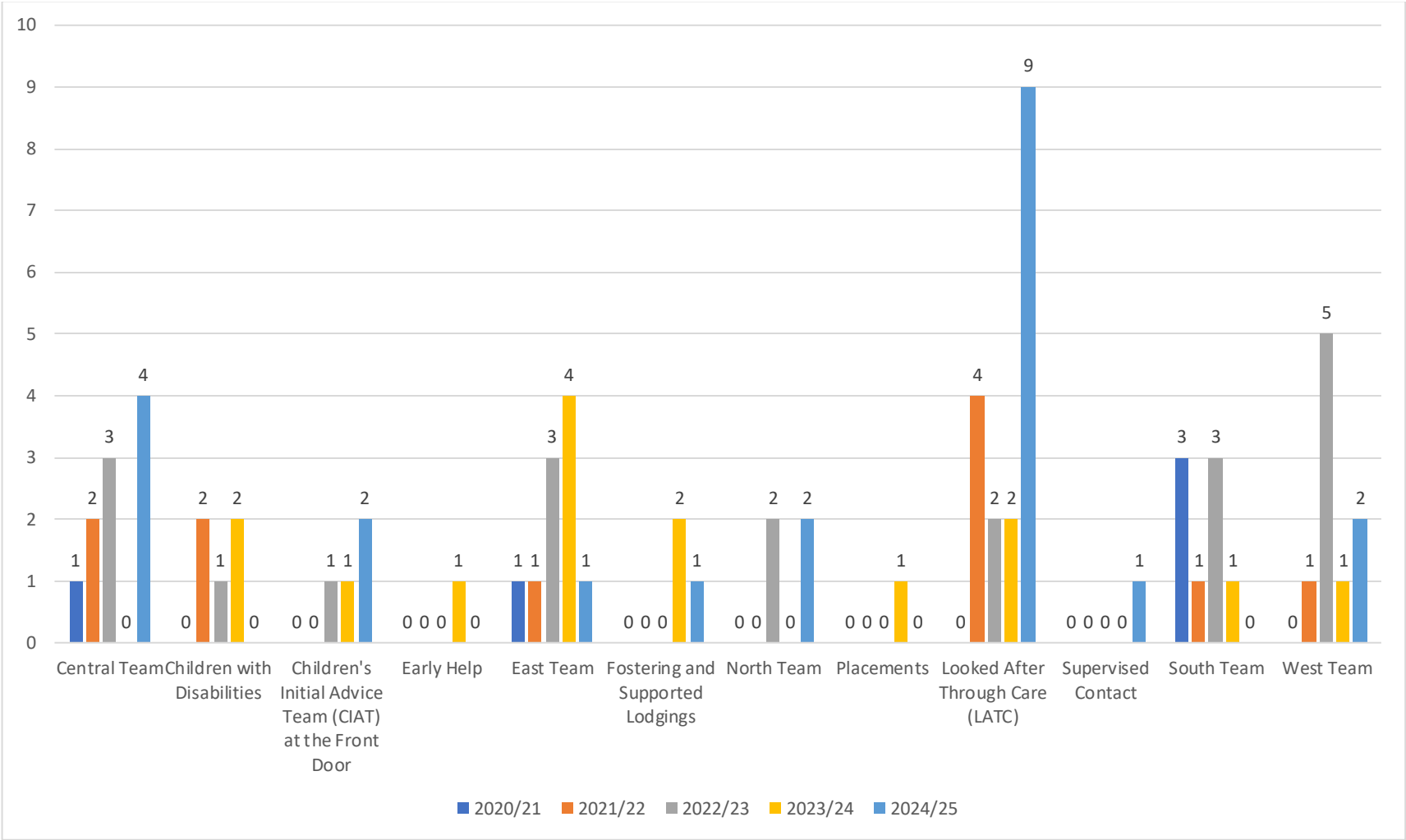


N.B. One complaint progressed directly to stage 2. Those teams that are not listed did not receive any complaints during 2024/25.

21. Central Team received six complaints, an increase from two in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was people's dissatisfaction with the attitude/behaviour of the social worker.
22. Children with Disabilities received four complaints, a decrease from 12 in 2023/24, and there were no identifiable themes.
23. Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) at the Front Door received two complaints, an increase from one in 2023/24 and 2023/23. The only identifiable theme was dissatisfaction with communication.
24. Early Help received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
25. East Team received five complaints, a decrease from 12 in 2023/24. The only identifiable theme was dissatisfaction with communication.
26. Fostering and Supported Lodgings received two complaints, the same number as in 2023/24, and there were no identifiable themes.
27. Independent Reviewing Officers received one complaint, the same as in 2023/24.
28. North Team received five complaints, a decrease from eight in 2023/24. Three of the complaints received concerned staff attitude/behaviour.
29. Placements received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
30. Residential Care received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
31. Looked After Through Care (LATC) received 18 complaints, an increase from nine in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was poor communication; other identifiable themes were delays in progressing matters and dissatisfaction with decisions.
32. South Team received seven complaints, an increase from four in 2023/24. The only identifiable theme was dissatisfaction with communication.
33. Strengthening Families received zero complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
34. Supervised Contact received one complaint, the same number as in 2023/24.
35. West Team received four complaints, a decrease from nine in 2023/24, and there were no identifiable themes.

Breakdown of Stage 2 Complaints by Service Area/Team

36. 22 complaints were investigated at Stage 2, an increase from 15 in 2023/24, 20 in 2022/23, 12 in 2021/22 and seven in 2020/21. One was subsequently suspended under Regulation 8, as a result of concurrent court proceedings.

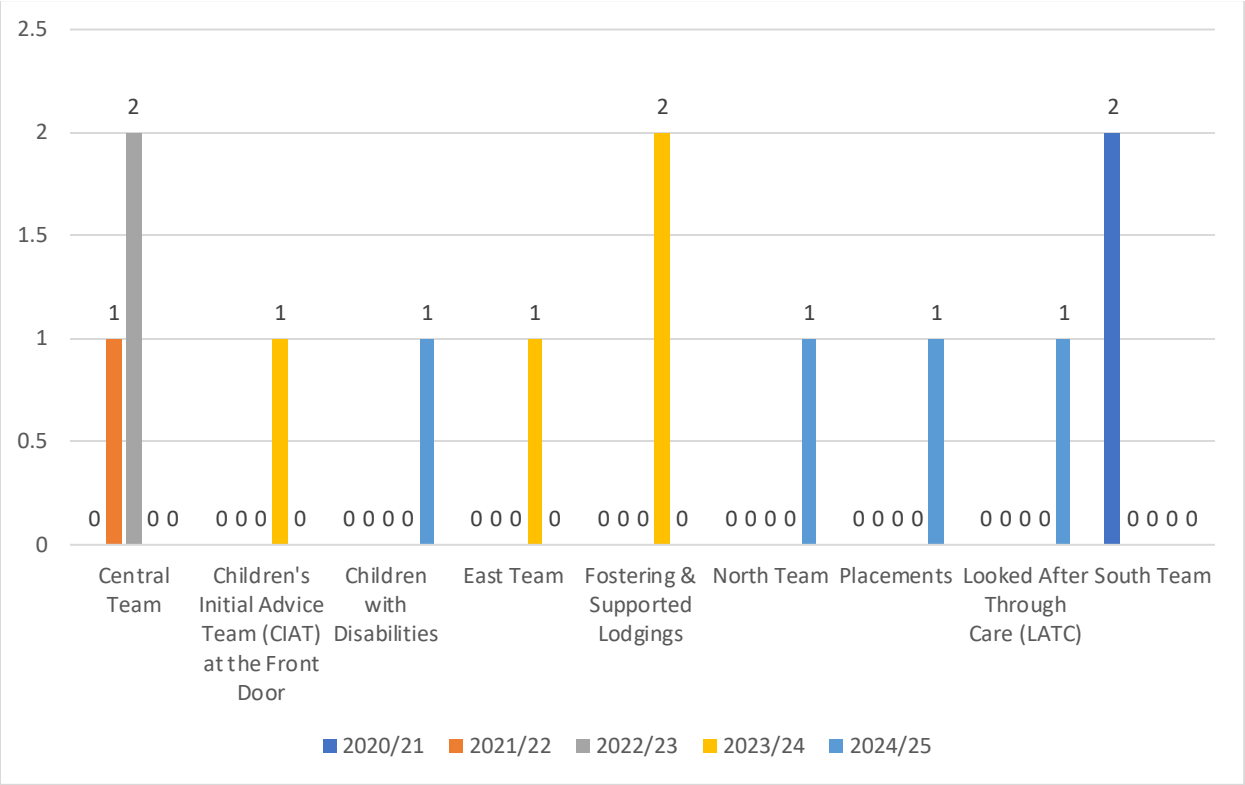


N.B. Those teams that are not listed did not receive any complaints during 2024/25.

37. Central Team received four stage 2 complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24. Complainants were dissatisfied with decisions, the actions of the social worker and their attitude/behaviour.
38. Children with Disabilities received zero stage 2 complaints, a decrease from 2 in 2023/24.
39. Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) at the Front Door received two stage 2 complaints, an increase from one in 2023/24.
40. Early Help received zero stage 2 complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
41. East Team received one stage 2 complaint, a decrease from four in 2023/24.
42. Fostering and Supported Lodgings received one stage 2 complaint, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
43. North Team received two stage 2 complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
44. Placements received zero stage 2 complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
45. Looked After Through Care (LATC) received nine stage 2 complaints, an increase from two in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was lack of communication.
46. South Team received zero stage 2 complaints, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
47. West Team received two stage 2 complaints, an increase from one in 2023/24.

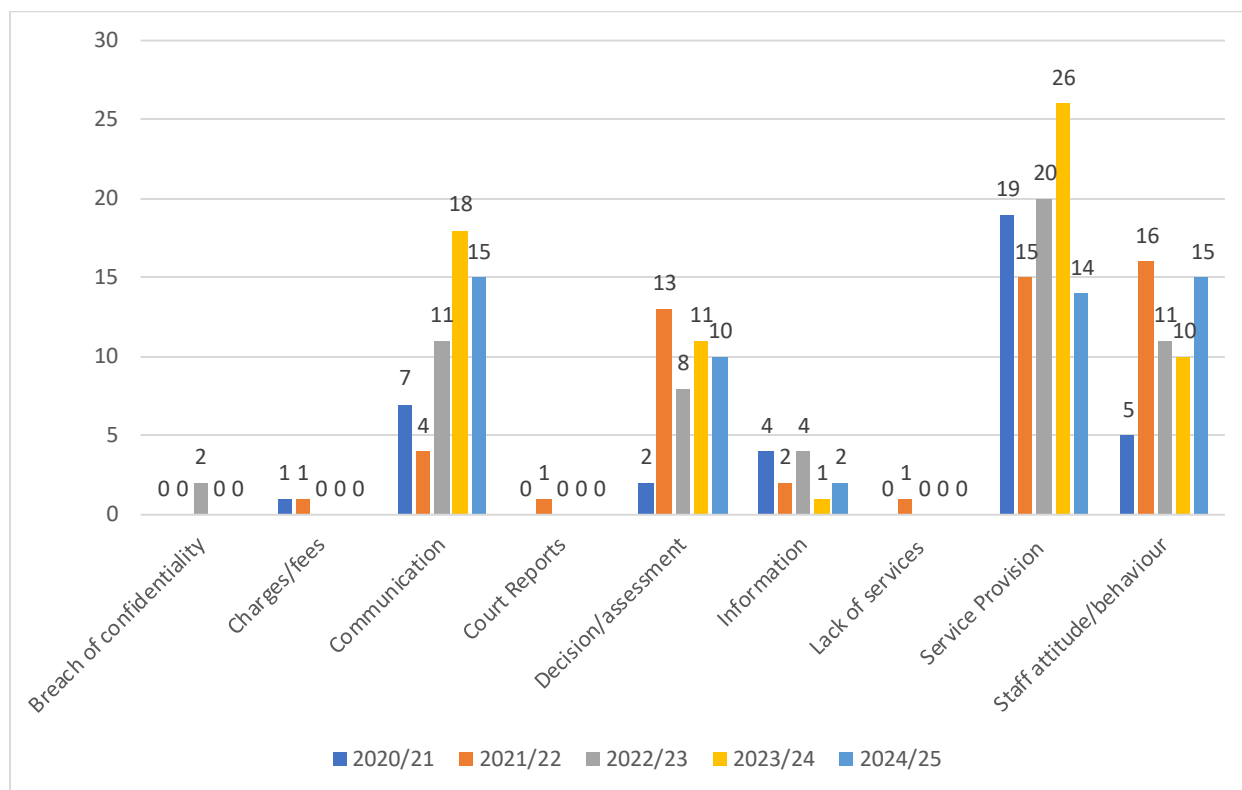
Breakdown of Stage 3 complaints by Service Area/Team

48. Four complaints were escalated to Stage 3, the same number as in 2023/24, an increase from two in 2022/23, one in 2021/22 and two in 2020/21.



N.B. Those teams that are not listed did not receive any complaints during 2024/25.

Breakdown of complaints by Issue



49. Communication and staff attitude/behaviour were the joint most commonly complained about issues in 2024/25. The Council received 15 complaints about communication, a decrease from 18 in 2023/24, although an increase from 11 in 2022/23, 4 in 2021/22 and 7 in 2020/21. The Council also received 15 complaints about staff attitude/behaviour, an increase from 10 complaints in 2023/24, 11 in 2022/23, a decrease from 16 in 2021/22 and an increase from five 2020/21.

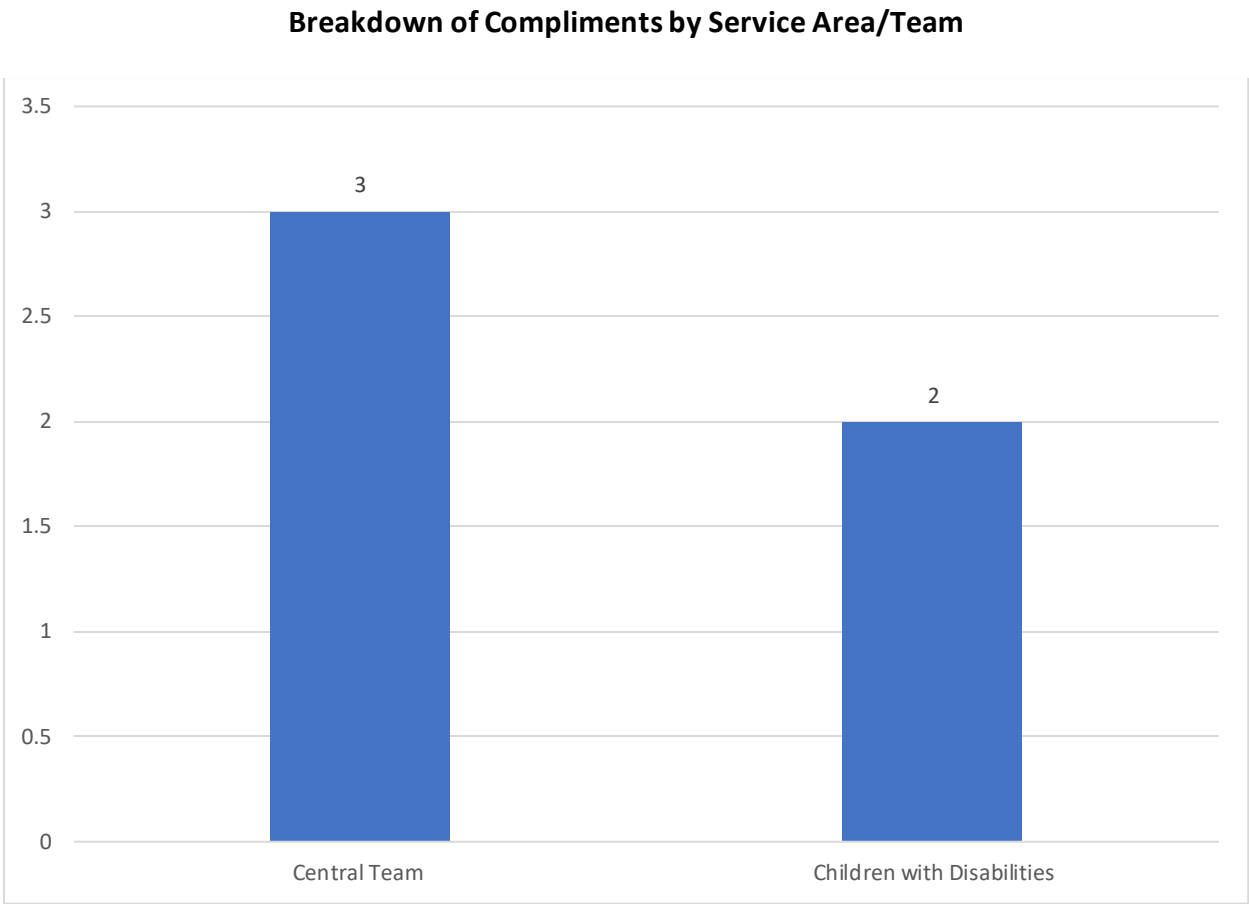
50. Service/provision was the second commonly complained about issue in 2024/25. The Council received 14 complaints, a significant decrease from 26 in 2023/24, a decrease from 20 in 2022/23, 15 in 2021/22 and 19 in 2020/21.

51. Decision/assessment was the third most complained about issues in 2024/25. The Council received 10 complaints about this issue, a decrease from 11 in 2023/24, an increase from 8 in 2022/23, a decrease from 13 in 2021/22 and an increase from two 2020/21.

52. The Council also received two complaints about information, an increase from one in 2023/24, a decrease from four in 2022/23, the same number as in 2021/22 and a decrease from four in 2020/21.

Breakdown of Comments by Service Area/Team

53. The Council did not receive any comments during 2024/25, 2023/24 or 2022/23, a decrease from one during 2021/22, and the same number as in 2020/21.



54. Children’s Services received five compliments, a decrease from six in 2023/24, eight in 2022/23 and 2021/22 and 15 in 2020/21.

Complaint Outcomes

Stage 1 - The below table shows the decisions reached on Stage 1 complaints during 2024/25.

Service Area/Team	Escalated to Stage 2 (No S1 Response)	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Children with Disabilities	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Independent Reviewing Officers	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Children's Initial Advice Team	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Supervised Contact	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
North Team	0	0	1	3	0	1	5
East Team	0	0	1	2	1	2	6
South Team	0	0	0	2	0	1	3
West Team	1	0	2	1	0	2	6
Central Team	0	0	5	0	0	1	6
Children with Disabilities	0	0	0	4	1	0	5
Looked After Through Care (LATC)	1	0	7	4	1	3	16
Fostering & Supported Lodgings	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Totals	2	0	18	18	5	11	54

Stage 2 - The below table shows the decisions reached on Stage 2 complaints during 2024/25.

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Children's Initial Advice Team	0	0	1	1	0	2
Supervised Contact	0	0	1	0	0	1
North Team	0	0	2	1	0	3
East Team	0	0	1	1	1	3
South Team	0	0	1	0	0	1
West Team	0	0	1	0	0	1
Placements	0	0	1	0	0	1
Looked After Through Care (LATC)	0	1	3	2	0	6
Fostering & Supported Lodgings	1	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	1	1	11	5	1	19

Stage 3 - The below table shows the decisions reached on Stage 3 complaints during 2024/25.

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
North Team	0	1	0	0	0	1
Placements	0	0	1	0	0	1
Looked After Through Care (LATC)	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	0	1	2	0	0	3

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaints

55. One complaint was referred to the LGSCO during 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.

56. One complaint was determined by the LGSCO during 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.

Organisational Learning

57. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints several service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2024/25. Some examples of these are detailed below.

Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) at the Front Door

58. Children's Services should consider a review of the skills and knowledge base of its Initial Advice Team to ensure contacts relating to children with disabilities are responded to consistently.

59. Children's Services considered an urgent update of its Children with Disabilities eligibility criteria document.

60. Darlington Borough Council remind social workers of the importance of good communication with service users, including checking how best to communicate with them.

61. Darlington Borough Council agreed to advise staff providing responses to complaints raised by service users of the need to send the response to the Complaints Team.

62. Darlington Borough Council agreed to advise staff providing stage 1 responses that the service user should be advised of their right to escalate the complaint to stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied.

East Team

63. Agreed to ensure they have adequate processes in place that assist social workers in undertaking necessary inquiries where a parent is in prison and wanting contact with a child.

64. Agreed to reminder to all social workers and team managers of the importance of detailed and timely case recording.

North Team

65. Agreed to remind staff of the correct process for Section 20, and the importance of ensuring parents understand what they are consenting to, and this is recorded, including a copy of the signed order.

- 66. Agreed to remind staff of the importance of accurate case recording particularly in reference to significant information and decision making.
- 67. Reviewed processes within Business Support services, to assure themselves that any contacts or referrals received by them, that bypass the front door, are appropriately recorded within case records, rather than being sent by e-mail to the allocated social worker.
- 68. Agreed to review training for frontline staff in terms of conscious/unconscious bias, with consideration given to how this can impact decision making.
- 69. Agreed to review practice to ensure statutory visits are undertaken during the Child Protection Process.

Placements

- 70. Reminded officers of the importance of timely communication with parents in accordance with the Council's Customer Standards.

Looked After Through Care (LATC)

- 71. Agreed to provide an update to social workers and managers regarding their duties and responsibilities under Section 47 of The Children Act 1989, in respect of gathering relevant information and including foster carers where the allegations is against them.
- 72. Darlington Borough Council Children's Services agreed to consider a review of how important personal documents are adequately recorded, stored, and returned to the owner, as part of a concurrent data breach investigation under the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- 73. Reminded social workers of the importance of regular and effective communication with connected carers, particularly around issues of family time.
- 74. Asked that the Principal Social Worker to consider the guidance in place around communication with families of children in care as part of next review.
- 75. Reminded staff of the importance of accurate recording and reviewing of contact arrangements within care planning.

Performance against the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

77. The below performance measures are in relation to those complaints responded to during 2024/25.

Timescales

Stage 1

78. The target for responding to a complaint at stage 1 is 10 working days, with a possible extension of up to 20 working days if the complaint is complex.

- (a) 38.6% of stage 1 complaint responses were sent within 10 working days. This was a decrease in performance from 50.9% in 2023/24.
- (b) A further 28.1% of stage 1 complaint responses were sent within 20 working days.
- (c) In total 66.7% of stage 1 complaint responses were sent within the maximum 20 working day timescale, a decrease in performance from 76.5% in 2023/24.

Stage 2

79. The target for responding to a complaint at stage 2 is 25 working days, extendable up to a maximum of 65 working days.

- (a) 5.3% of stage 2 complaint responses were sent within 25 working days during 2024/25, a decrease from 6.3% in 2023/24.
- (b) 5.3% of stage 2 complaint responses were sent within the maximum timescale allowed (65 working days), a decrease in performance from 12.5% in 2023/24.
- (c) 94.7% of stage 2 complaint responses were sent after 65 working days, a decrease in performance from 87.5% in 2023/24.

Stage 3

80. At stage 3 the Review Panel should be held within 30 working days of the request. 75% of Review Panels were held within 30 working days.

81. The Review Panel should write to the Director within 5 working days of the panel. They did so in 75% of cases.

82. The Director should write to the complainant within 15 working days of receiving the Panel's response. The Director wrote to the complainants within 15 working days in 100% of cases, as was the case in 2023/24.

Performance against key performance indicators

83. In relation to children's social care complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of upheld decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Children's Services received zero upheld decisions during 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24, the same number as in 2022/23 and 2021/22 and a decrease from one in 2020/21.
84. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Further recommendations

85. Children's Services and the Complaints Manager should work to improve the timeliness and quality of stage 1 responses, ensuring lessons are learned in order to reduce the overall number of complaints received and the number progressing to stages 2 and 3. The Complaints Manager has already ran several in house training sessions for staff required to respond to stage 1 complaints.
86. Children's Services and the Complaints Manager should work to performance against stage 2 response timescale.

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DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

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Introduction

1. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2024/25 under the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the corporate procedure). The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year as a result of the complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend and performance data to improve services. The report also highlights those areas of good practice within the Council and seeks to identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public, so the Council can also take action where appropriate to improve services.
2. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report, it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

3. In February 2024 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) issued its Complaints Handling Code (the Code) as “advice and guidance” for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. The LGSCO encouraged to adopt the Code as soon as they are able to do so. The LGSCO intend to start considering the Code as part of their processes from April 2026 at the earliest to give councils the opportunity to adopt the Code successfully into working practices. The Code only applies to complaints where there is no statutory process in place.
4. The Council reviewed its procedure prior to 1 April 2024 to ensure it is compliant with the Code. The corporate procedure sets out how the Council will deal with all complaints, compliments and comments received with the exception of those where there is a statutory process in place i.e. adult and children’s social care services, public health, some social housing complaints and Members complaints.
5. The corporate procedure has two stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day to day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the corporate procedure.
6. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Council’s Complaints Investigator, the Complaints and Information Governance Manager or another officer independent of the service being complained about.
7. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following a Stage 2 investigation they may refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Public Information and Accessibility

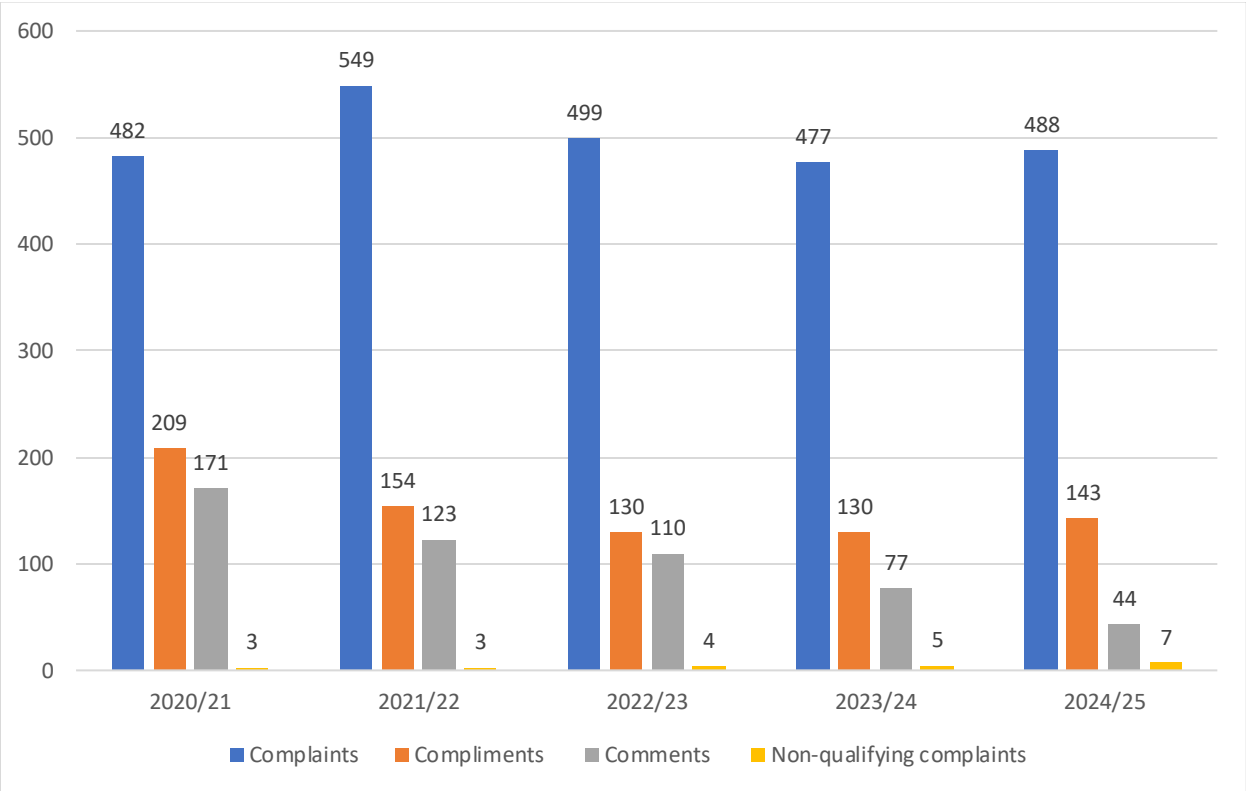
8. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible, information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
9. We have also produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
10. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

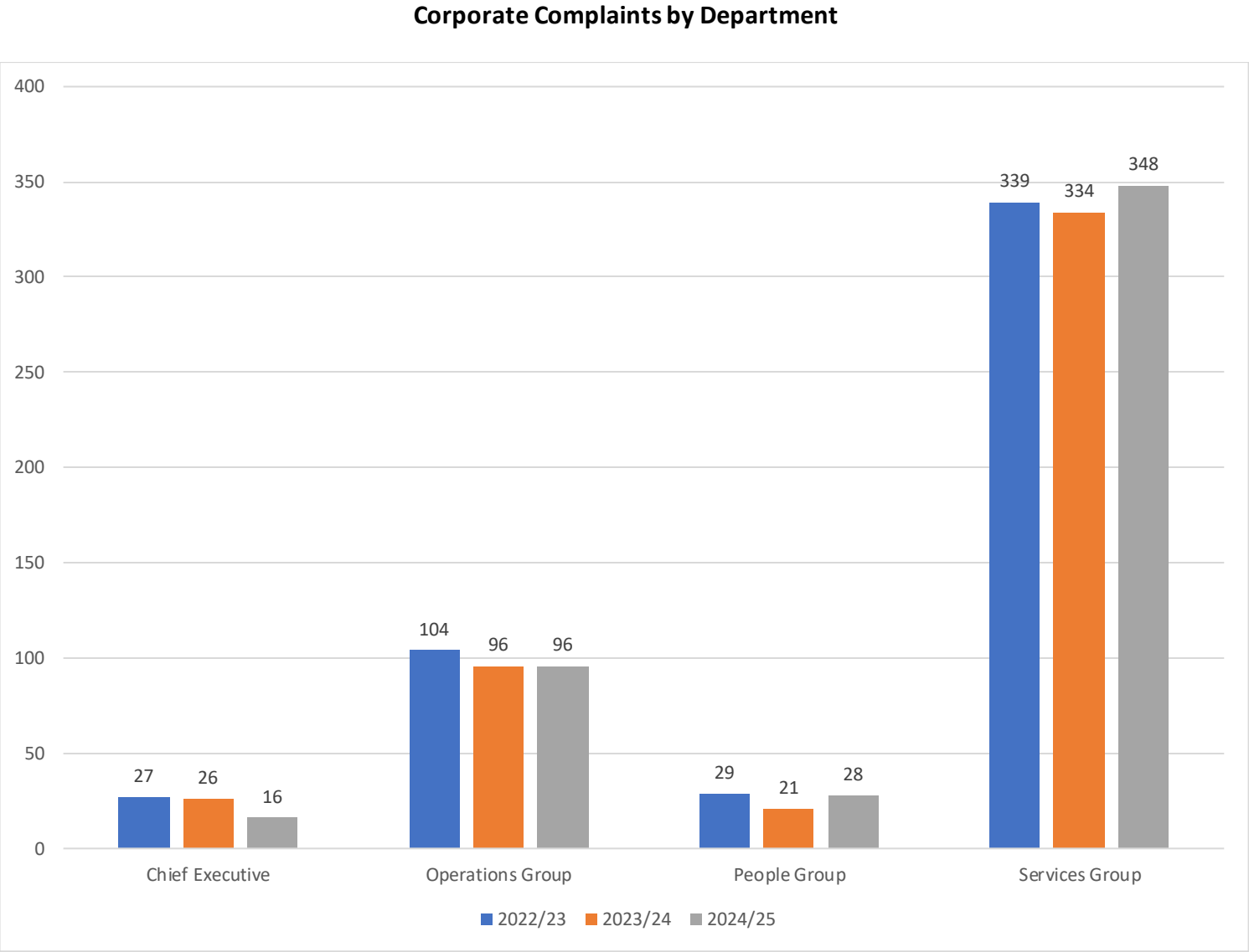
Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

Overview of Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments

- 11. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 the Council received a total of 682 representations under the corporate procedure, a decrease from 689 in 2023/24.
- 12. The Council received 488 corporate complaints in 2024/25, an increase from 477 in 2023/24. 467 complaints were initially dealt with at Stage 1 of the corporate procedure, whilst 21 were escalated directly to Stage 2. 52 Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 following a Stage 1 investigation. In total 73 complaints were investigated at Stage 2, a decrease from 84 in 2023/24.
- 13. The Council received 143 corporate compliments in 2024/25, an increase from 130 in 2023/24.
- 14. The Council received 44 corporate comments in 2024/25, a reduction from 77 in 2023/24.
- 15. The Council also received seven non-qualifying corporate complaints in 2024/25, an increase from five in 2023/24.

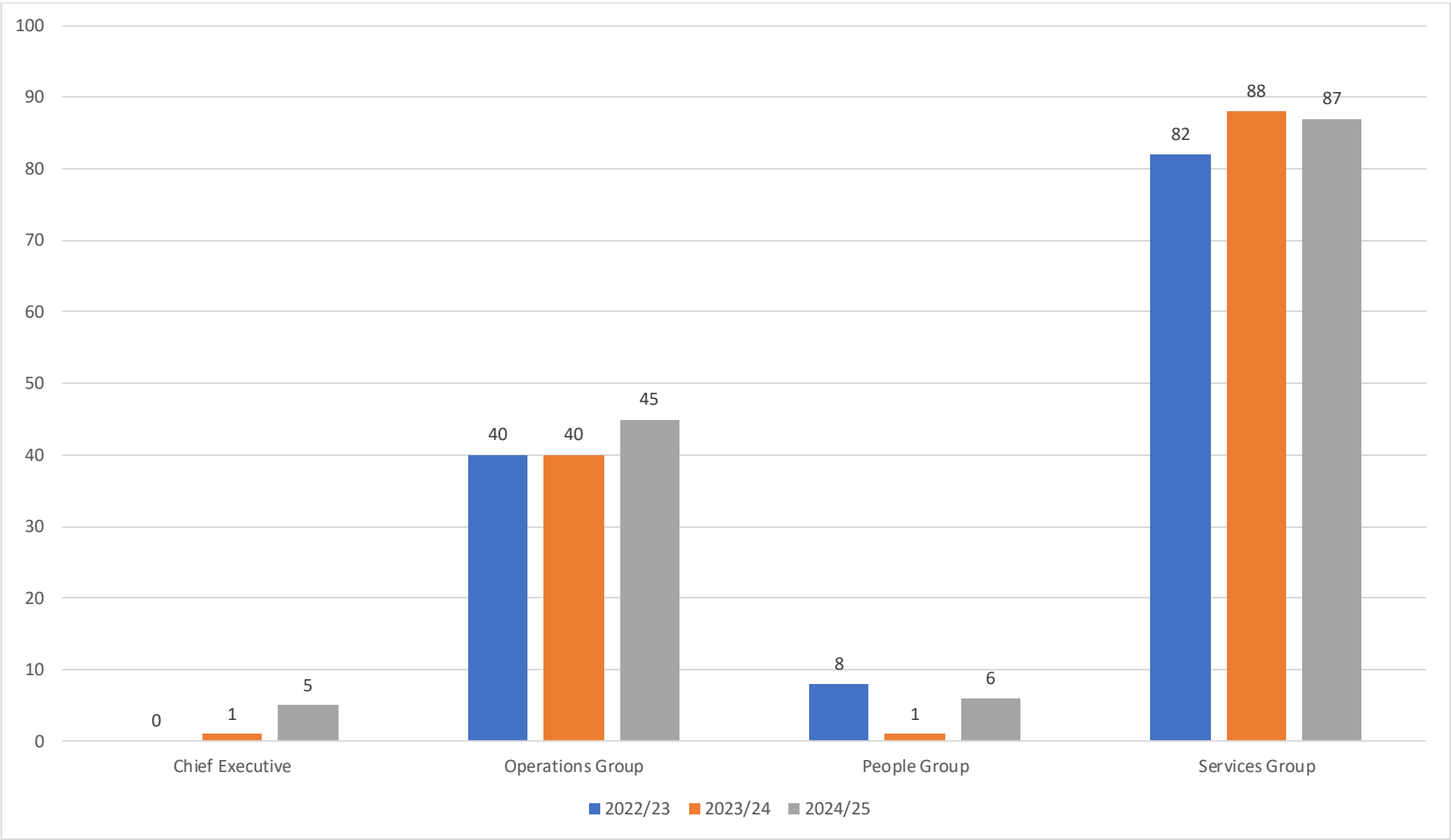
Total Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments



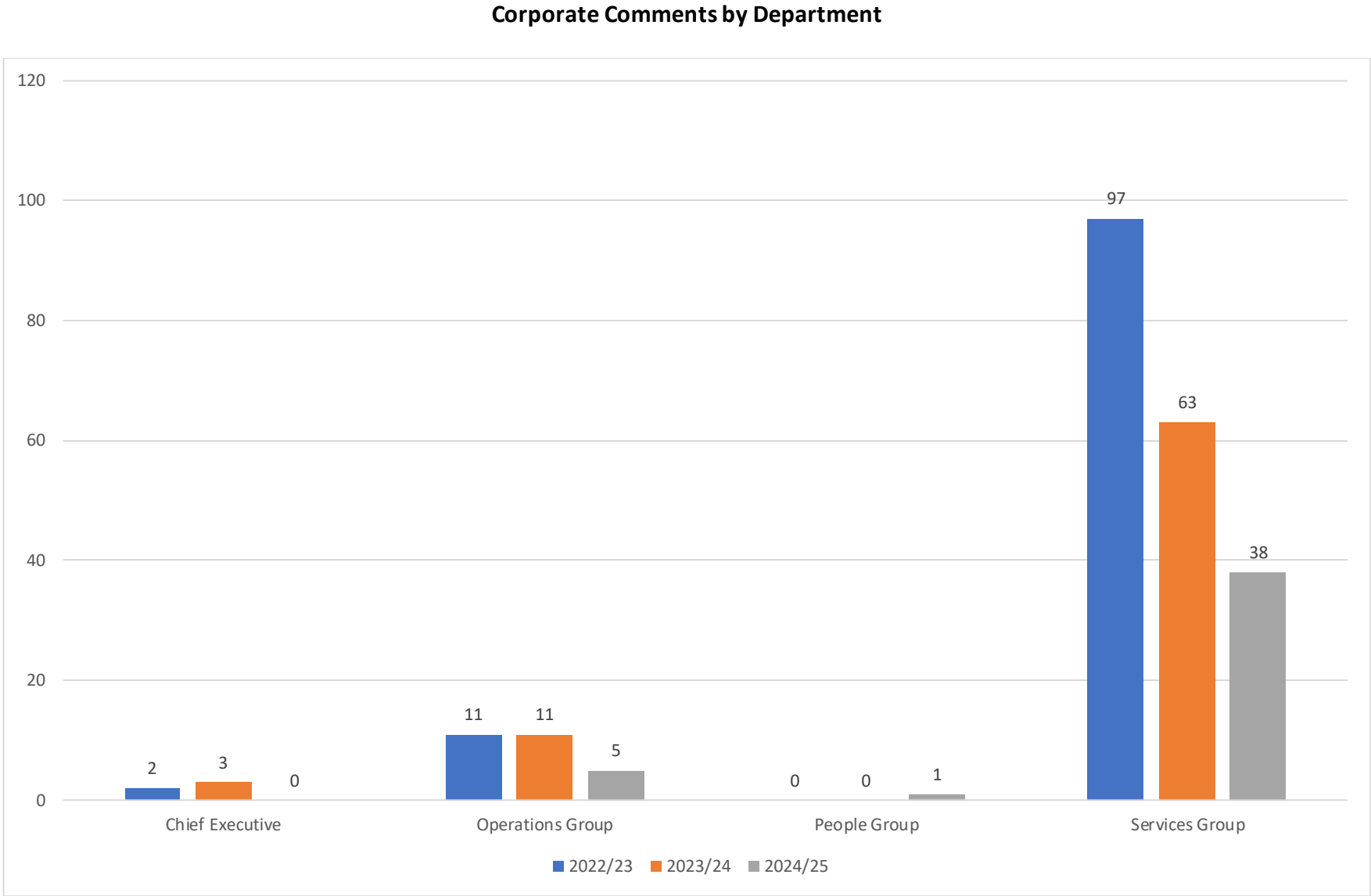


N.B. Direct comparison data is not available prior to 2022/23 due to the change in the Council’s organisational structure.

Corporate Compliments by Department



N.B. Direct comparison data is not available prior to 2022/23 due to the change in the Council’s organisational structure.

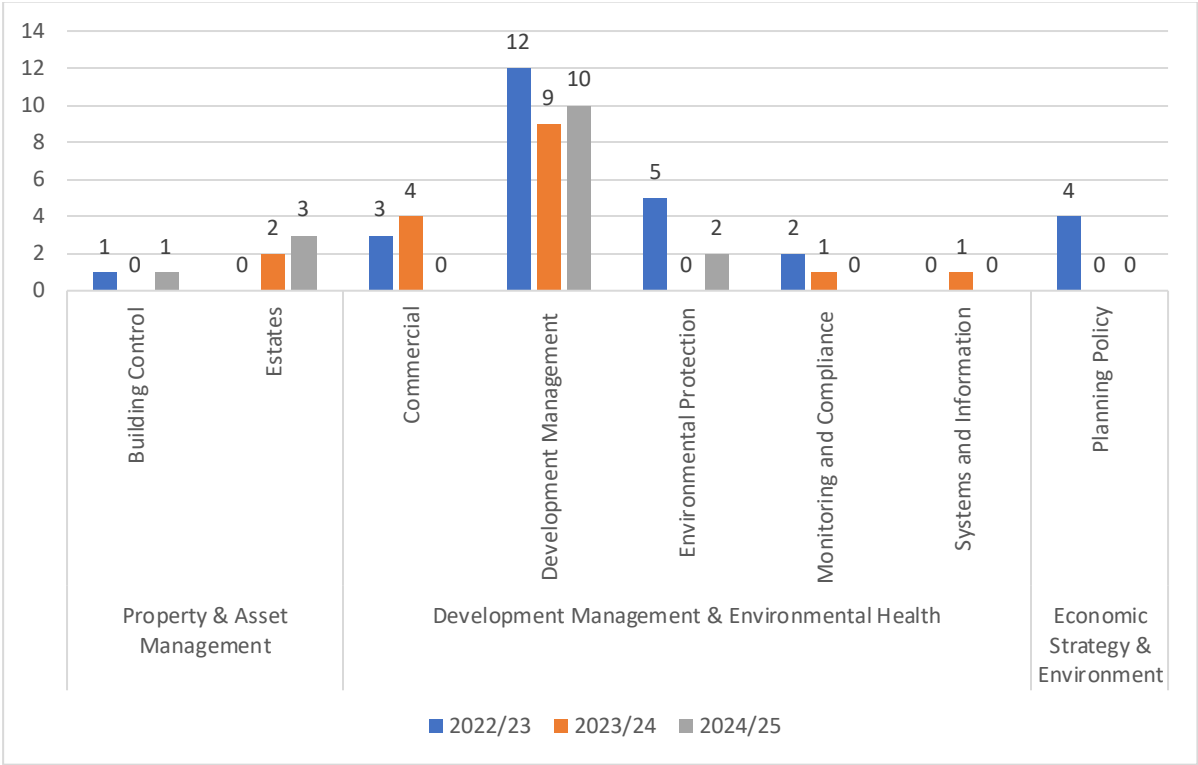


N.B. Direct comparison data is not available prior to 2022/23 due to the change in the Council’s organisational structure.

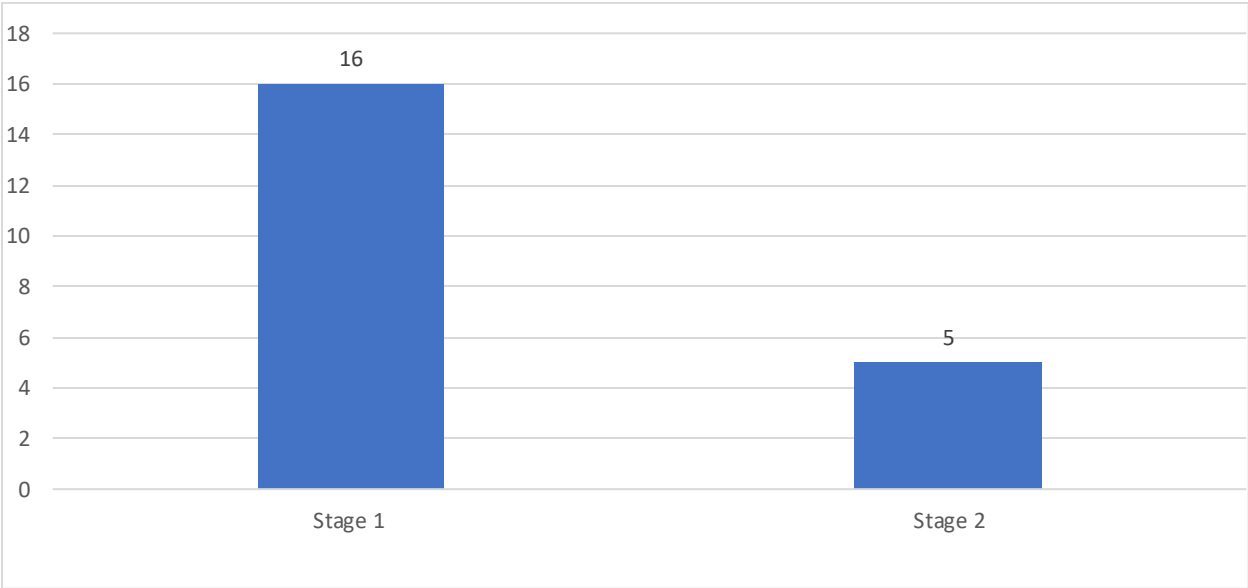
Complaints, Compliments and Comments by Department

Chief Executive
Complaints by Service Area/Team

16. Chief Executive received 16 corporate complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 17 in 2023/24.



Complaints by Stage



Compliments by Service Area/Team

18. Chief Executive received five compliments, two for Commercial and three for Environmental Protection, an increase from one for Building Control in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

19. Chief Executive received zero comments, a decrease from three in 2023/24.

Complaints by Outcome

20. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Estates	1	0	0	0	1	2
Building Control	0	0	0	0	1	1
Development Management	0	8	1	1	0	10
Commercial	0	0	0	1	0	1
Environmental Protection	0	0	1	0	1	2
Totals	1	8	2	2	3	16

Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Development Management	0	5	1	0	0	6
Systems and Information	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	0	5	2	0	0	7

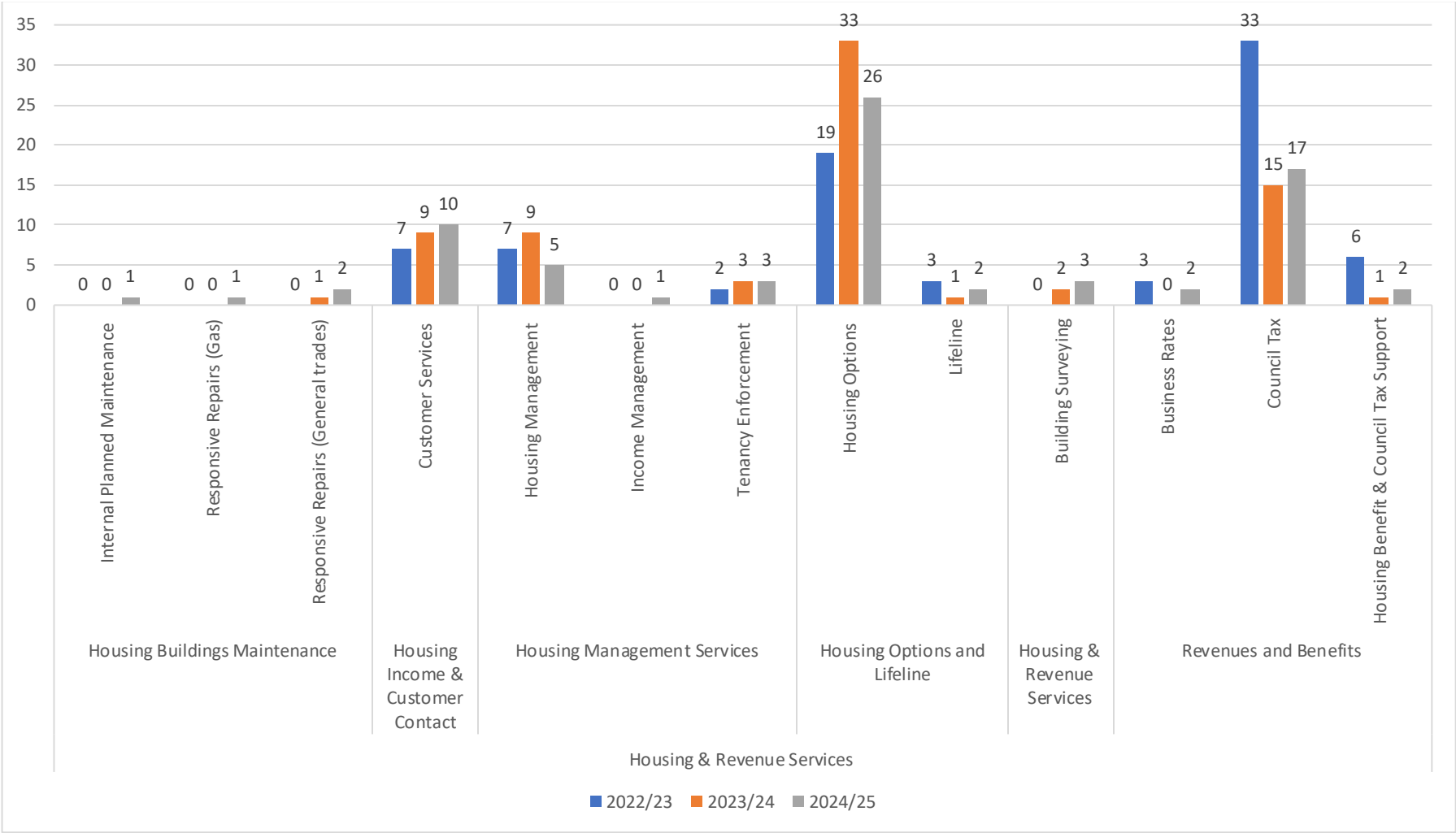
Organisational Learning

21. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of corporate complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
22. Following a complaint for Systems and Information, the Council corrected its website to indicate when maintenance tasks may affect the availability of the public access section of the website, which allows people to view planning applications on-line.

Operations Group

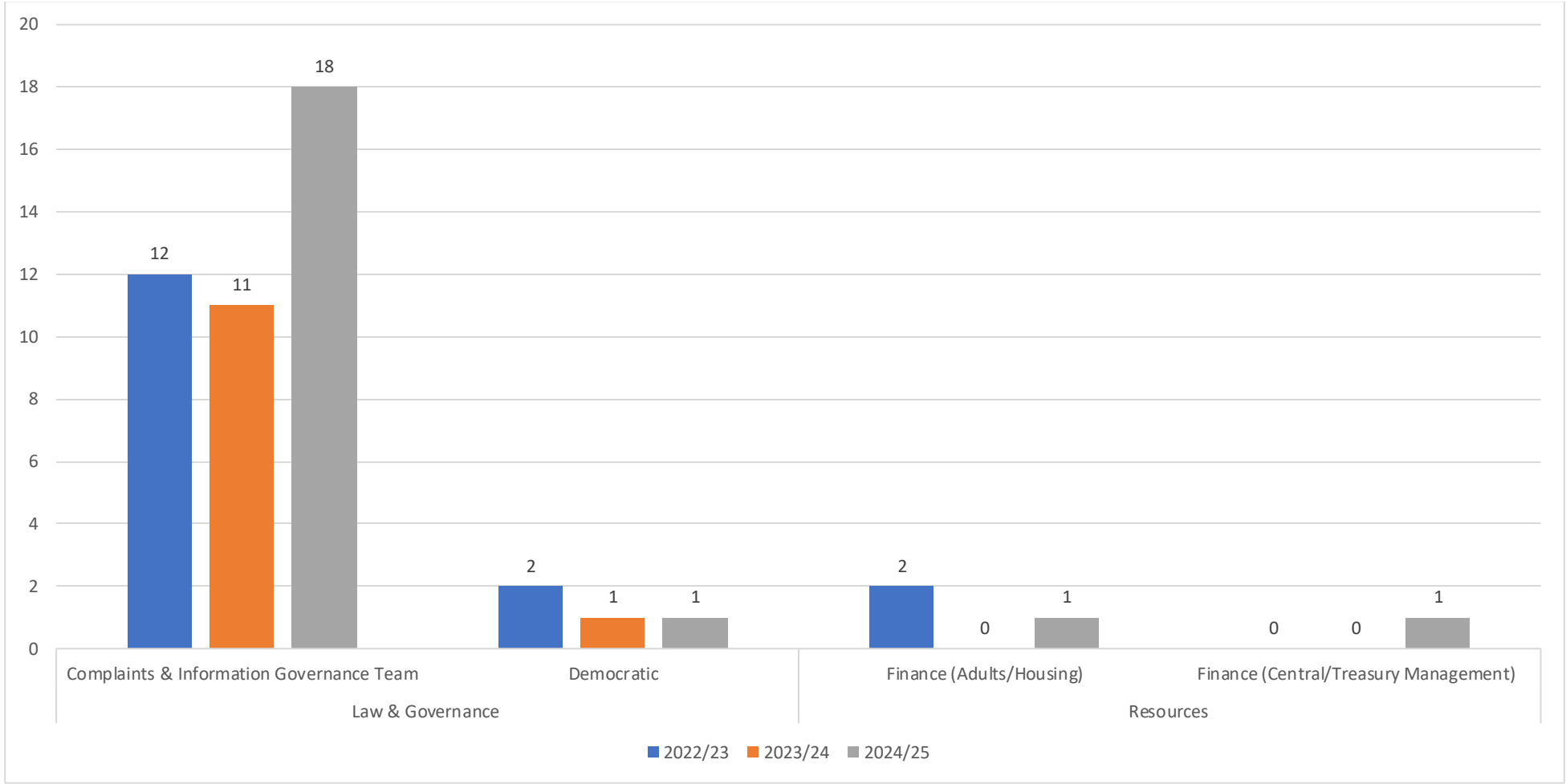
Complaints by Service Area/Team

32. Operations Group received 96 corporate complaints during 2024/25.

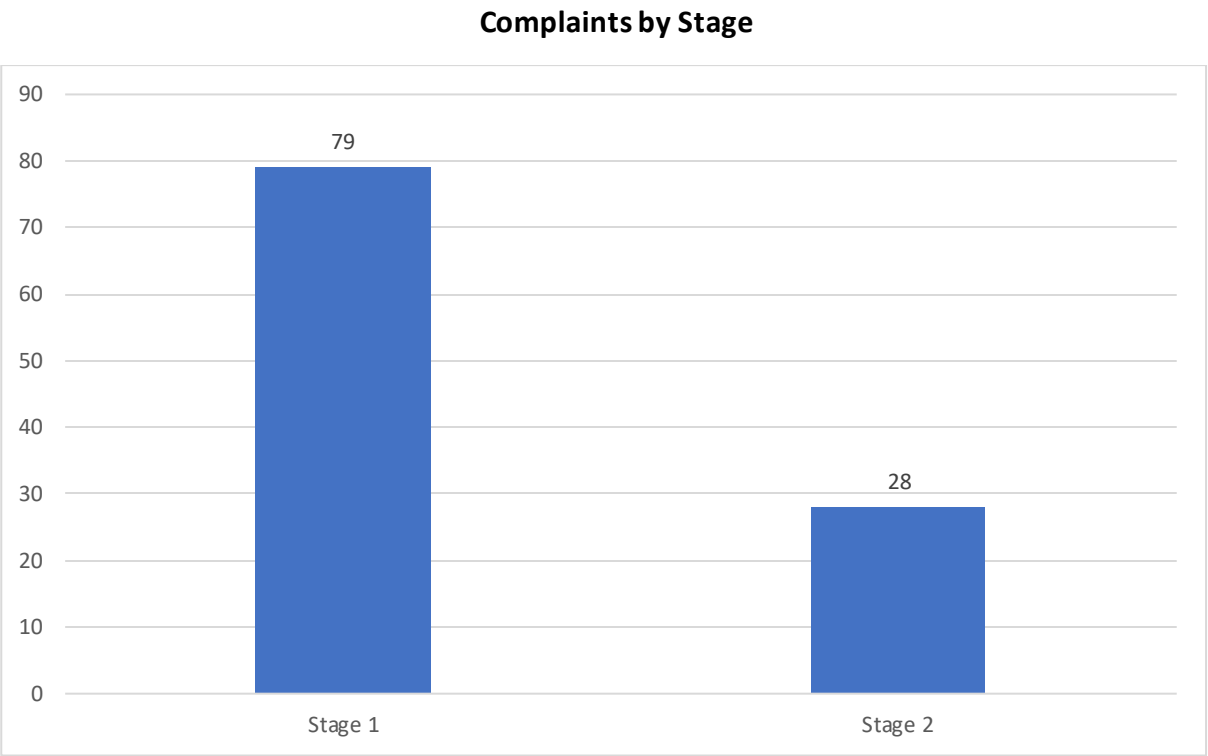


33. Internal Planned Maintenance received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
34. Responsive Repairs (Gas) received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
35. Responsive Repairs (General Trades) received two corporate complaints during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
36. Customer Services received 10 corporate complaints during 2024/25, an increase from nine in 2023/24. Six complaints concerned the delays in the application process for Blue Badges, a decrease from seven complaints about this issue in 2023/24.
37. Housing Management received five corporate complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from nine during 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
38. Income Management received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
39. Tenancy Enforcement received three corporate complaints in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. All three complaints concerned a lack of action in relation to neighbour nuisance issues.
40. Housing Options received 26 corporate complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 33 in 2023/24. Complaints concerned people's dissatisfaction with their eligibility/banding, the kinds of properties they were able to bid on, not being allowed to bid due to rent arrears, the level of support provided and poor communication.
41. Lifeline received two corporate complaints in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
42. Building Surveying received three corporate complaints during 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. All three complaints concerned a lack of communication in relation to works to neighbouring Council properties.
43. Business Rates received two complaints in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
44. Council Tax received 17 complaints in 2024/25, an increase from 15 in 2023/24. Communication remained the most common cause of complaint.
45. Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support received two complaints in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.

Operations continued...



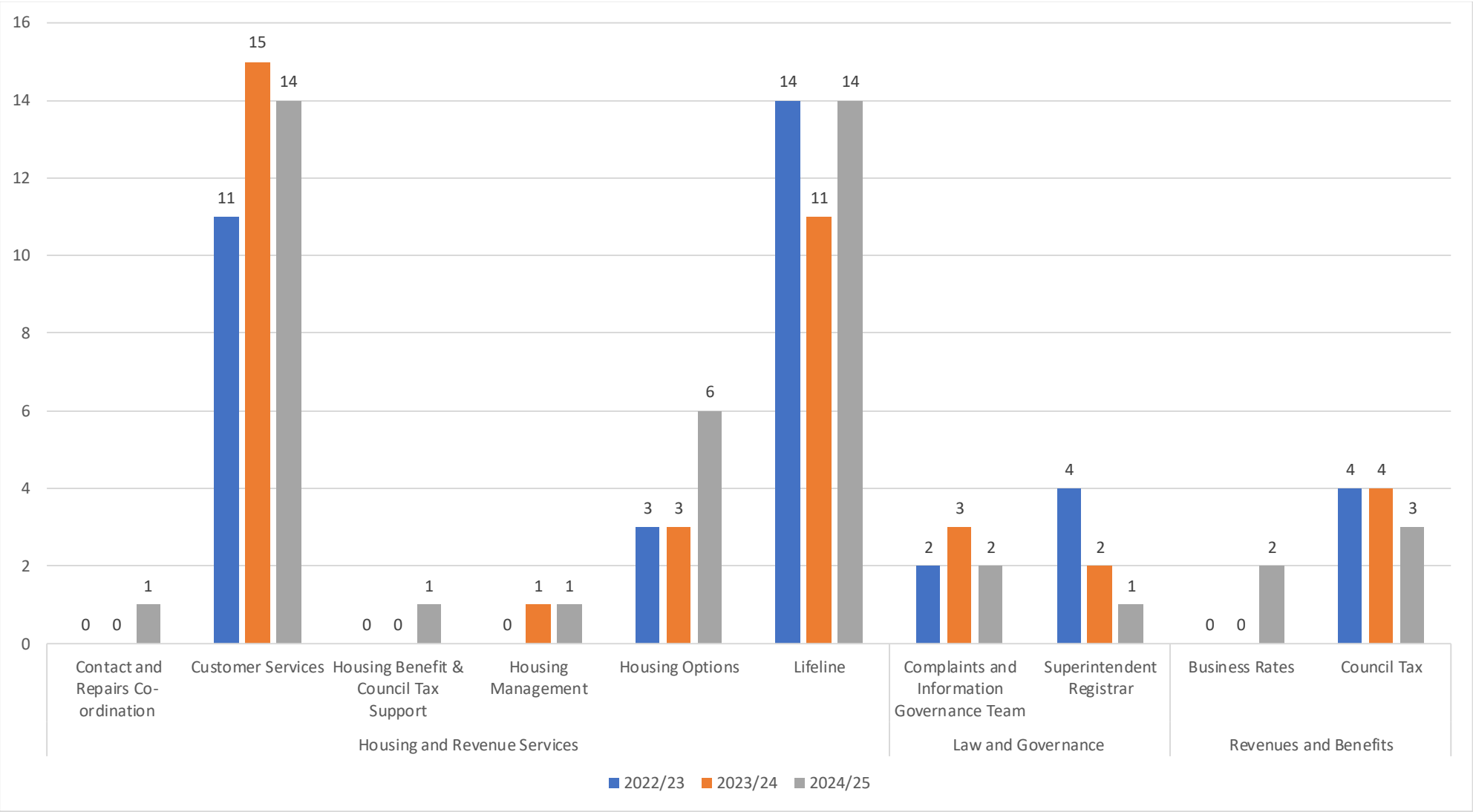
- 46. Complaints and Information Governance Team received 18 complaints, an increase from 11 in 2023/24. The most common theme was people’s dissatisfaction with the timeliness and/or content of the response to their Subject Access Request (SAR).
- 47. Democratic received one complaint in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
- 48. Finance (Adults/Housing) received one corporate complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 49. Finance (Central/Treasury Management) received one corporate complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.



N.B. 17 complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2

Compliments by Service Area/Team

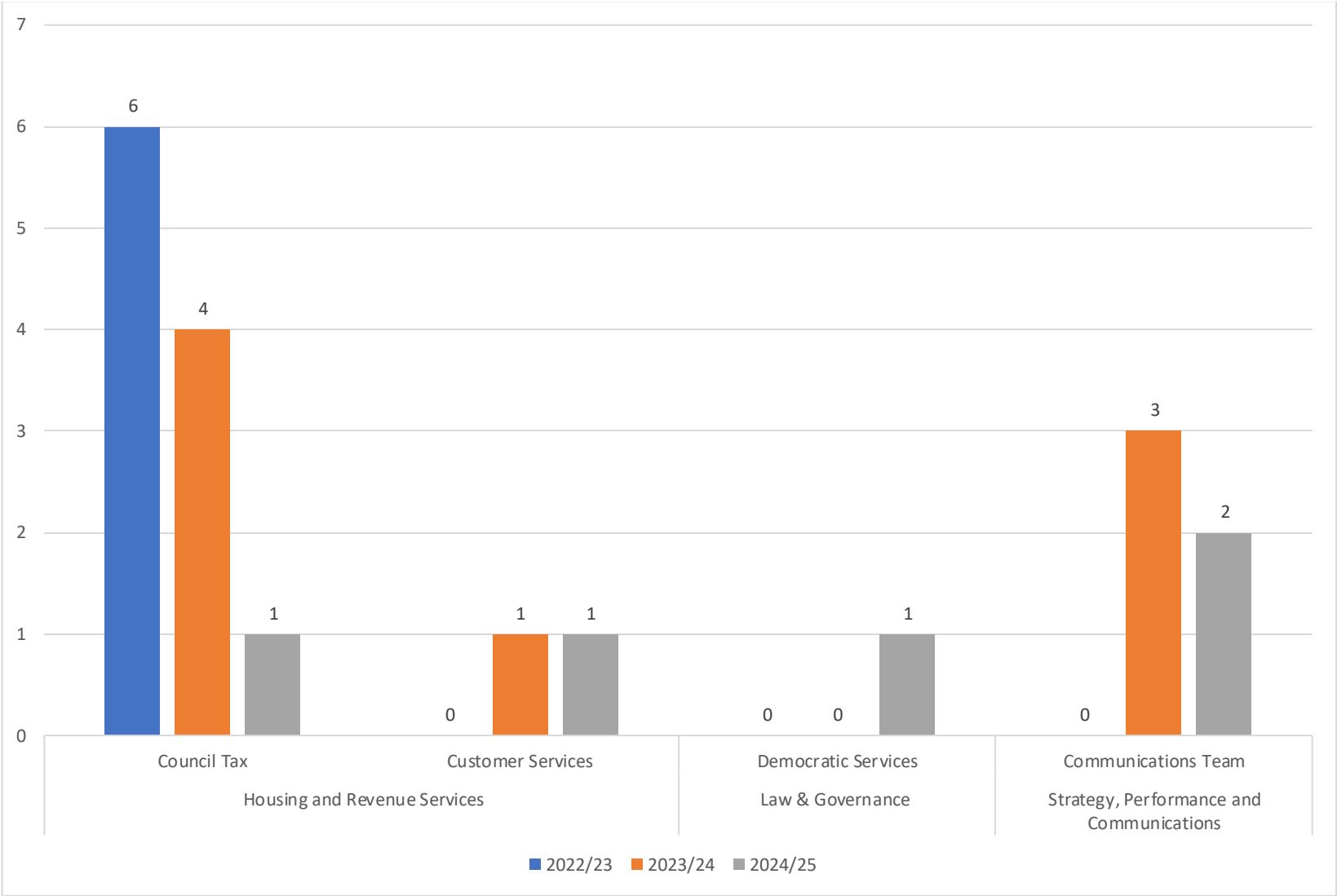
50. Operations Group received 45 corporate compliments during 2024/25.



51. Contact and Repairs Co-ordination received one corporate compliment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
52. Customer Services received 14 corporate compliments in 2024/25, a slight decrease from 15 during 2023/24. The main themes were people's satisfaction with the service provided and assistance in applying for Blue Badges.
53. Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
54. Housing Management received one corporate compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
55. Housing Options received six corporate compliments in 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24.
56. Lifeline received 14 corporate compliments during 2024/25, an increase from 11 in 2023/24. The main theme was people's satisfaction with the service provided, particularly in relation to staff responding to incidents.
57. Complaints and Information Governance Team received two compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.
58. Superintendent Registrar received one compliment during 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
59. Council Tax received three compliments in 2024/25, a decrease from four in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

60. Operations Group received five corporate comments during 2024/25.



32. Council Tax received one comment, a decrease from four in 2023/24.
33. Customer Services received one corporate comment during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
34. Democratic Services received one comment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
35. Communications Team received two comments during 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.

Complaints by Outcome

36. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Escalated to Stage 2 no Stage 1 Response	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Communications Team	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Complaints and Information Governance Team	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Finance (Central/Treasury Management)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Finance (Adults/Housing)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Customer Services	0	0	1	0	1	9	11
Income Management	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Housing Management	0	0	2	1	1	1	5
Tenancy Enforcement	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Housing Options	0	2	11	4	2	4	23
Lifeline	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Business Rates	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Council Tax	0	0	11	1	4	1	17
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
General trades	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Internal Planned Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Building Surveying	1	0	0	2	1	0	4
Totals	2	2	31	11	12	20	78

Stage 2 Outcomes

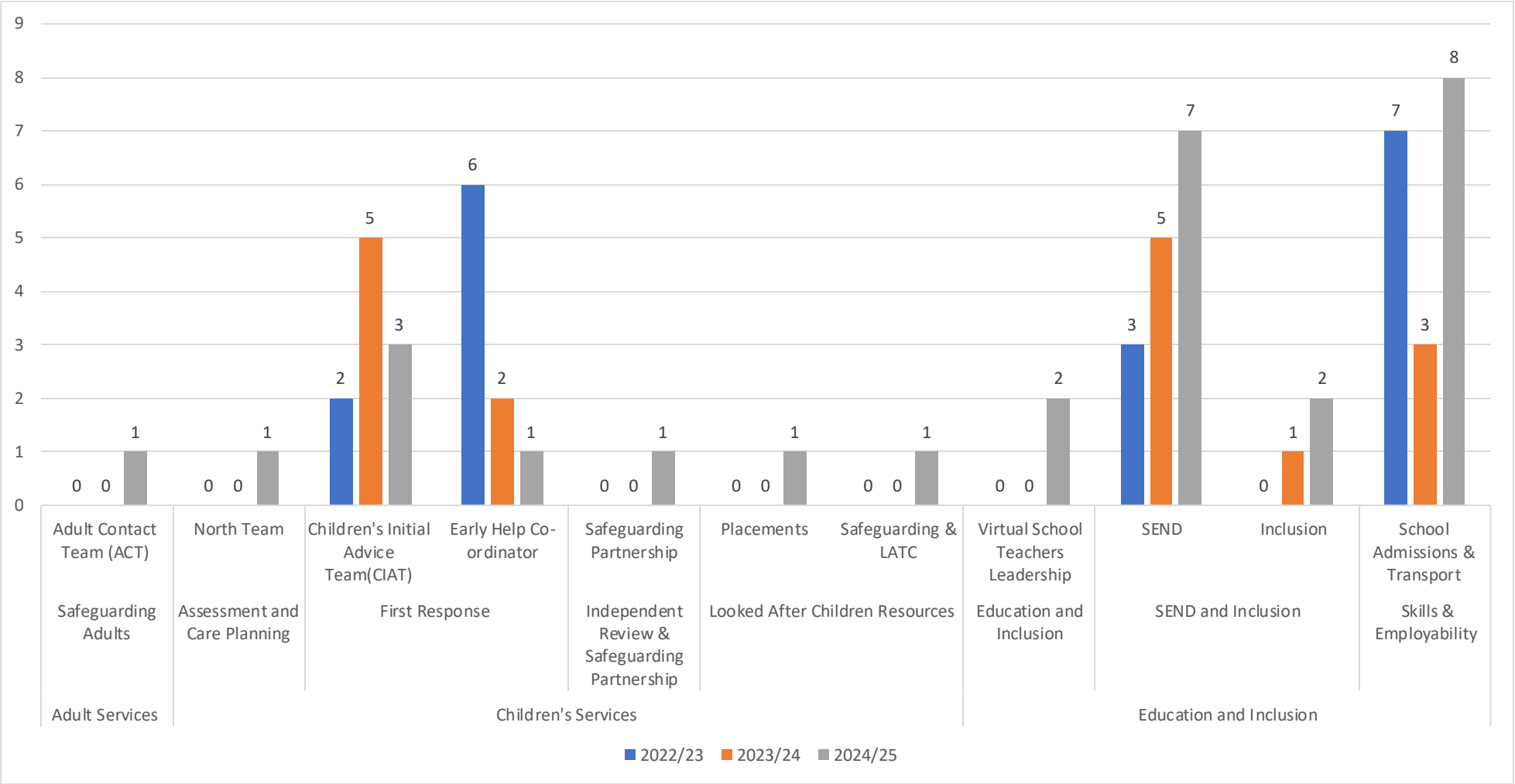
Service Area/Team	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Complaints and Information Governance Team	4	3	9	1	17
Democratic	1	0	0	0	1
Superintendent Registrar	0	1	0	0	1
Housing Options	3	2	0	0	5
Lifeline	0	1	0	0	1
Council Tax	1	2	1	0	4
Totals	9	9	10	1	29

Organisational learning

37. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
38. Following a complaint for Housing Options, the Council made sure officers making decisions on housing applications are clear, that in accordance with the Housing Services Allocations Policy 2023 – 2028, they cannot consider spent convictions as part of the assessment process.
39. Following another complaint for Housing Options, it was agreed that in accordance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, the Housing Options service would incorporate the duty to refer into their wider homelessness strategy and joint working arrangements and establish local arrangements with agencies in regard to referrals.
40. Following a complaint for Lifeline, it was agreed staff would be instructed to ensure that the proper checks are undertaken to avoid incorrect contact details being recorded in a customer's records. It was also agreed the new telecare agreement will show the client's contact number so they can check the information provided is correct. Lifeline officers were also reminded to ensure they discuss the most appropriate place to locate the Lifeline unit with the customer and explain any rationale if they propose to re-locate it.

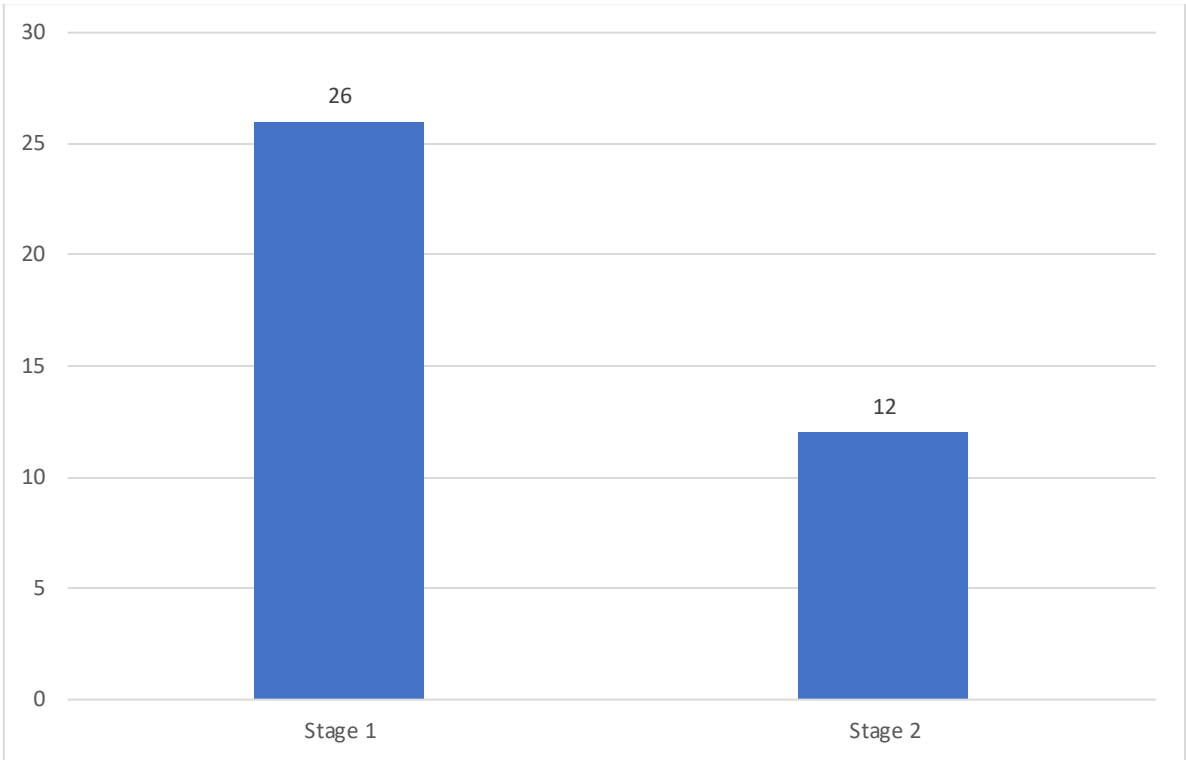
People Group
Complaints by Service Area/Team

41. People Group received 28 corporate complaints during 2024/25.



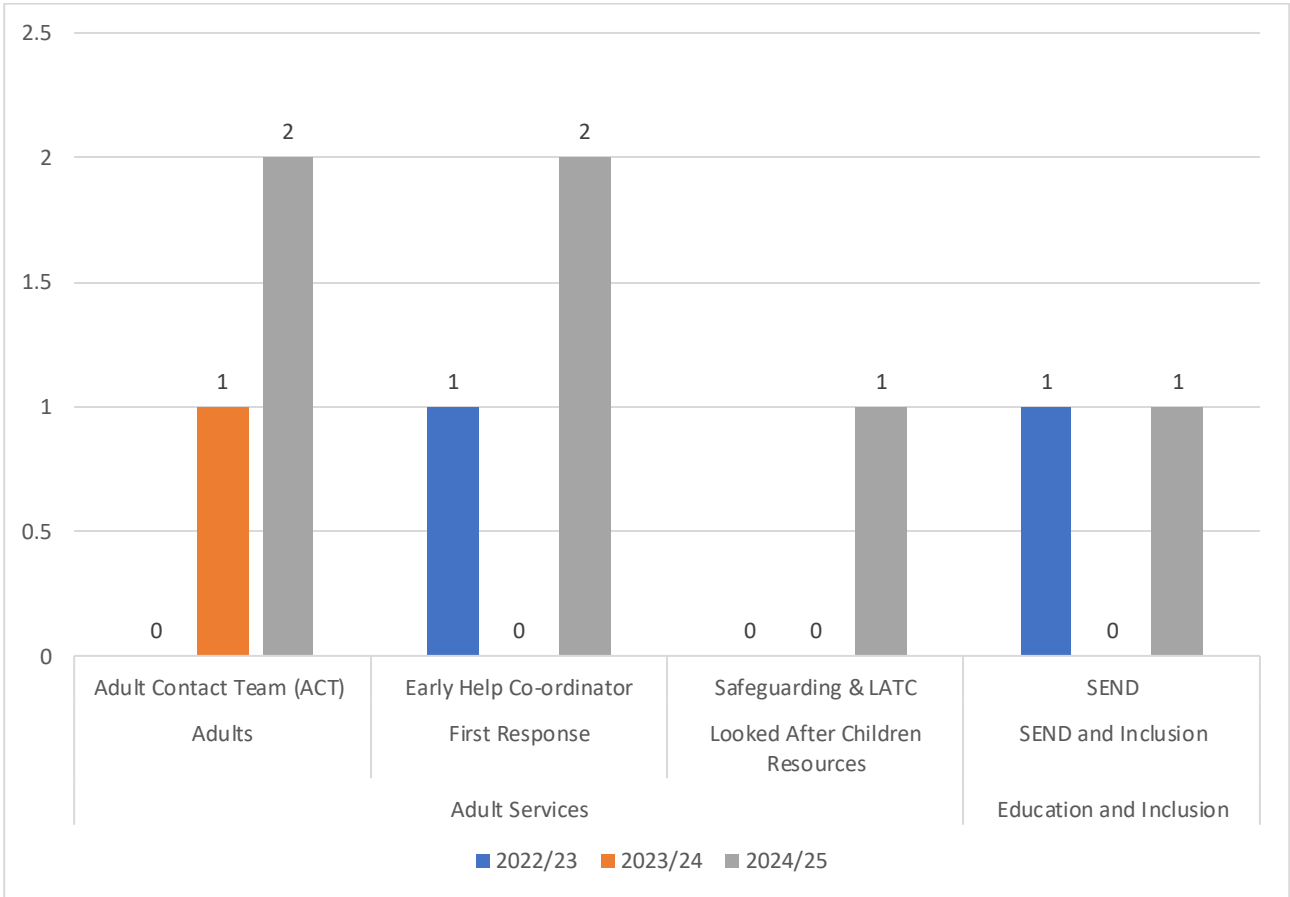
42. Adult Contact Team (ACT) received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
43. North Team received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
44. Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) received three corporate complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes in the complaints received.
45. Early Help Co-ordinator received one corporate complaint in 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
46. Safeguarding Partnership received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
47. Placements received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
48. Safeguarding & Looked After Through Care (LATC) received one corporate complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
49. Virtual School Teachers Leadership received two complaints during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
50. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) received seven complaints during 2024/25, an increase from five in 2023/24. Delays in securing the provision outlined in EHC Plans was an identifiable theme.
51. Inclusion received two complaints during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
52. School Admissions & Transport received eight complaints during 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was dissatisfaction with the school transport service provided.

Complaints by Stage



N.B. Two complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2

Compliments by Service Area/Team



- 53. Adult Contact Team (ACT) received two corporate compliments in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
- 54. Early Help Co-ordinator received two corporate compliments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 55. Safeguarding & Looked After Through Care (LATC) received one corporate compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 56. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

- 57. SEND received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Complaints by Outcome

58. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Adult Contact Team	0	0	0	0	1	1
Safeguarding Partnership	0	1	0	0	0	1
Early Help Co-ordinator	0	1	0	0	0	1
Children's Initial Advice Team	0	0	1	1	0	2
North Team	0	1	0	0	0	1
SEND	0	3	2	0	1	6
Inclusion	0	1	0	2	0	3
School Admissions & Transport	0	5	2	1	0	8
Virtual School Teachers Leadership	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	0	12	5	5	2	24

Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) at the Front Door	0	0	0	1	0	1
Early Help Co-ordinator	0	0	1	0	0	1
Placements	0	0	0	1	0	1
Safeguarding & LATC	0	1	0	0	0	1
SEND	0	1	4	0	0	5
Inclusion	0	0	1	1	0	2
School Admissions & Transport	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	0	2	7	3	0	12

Organisational learning

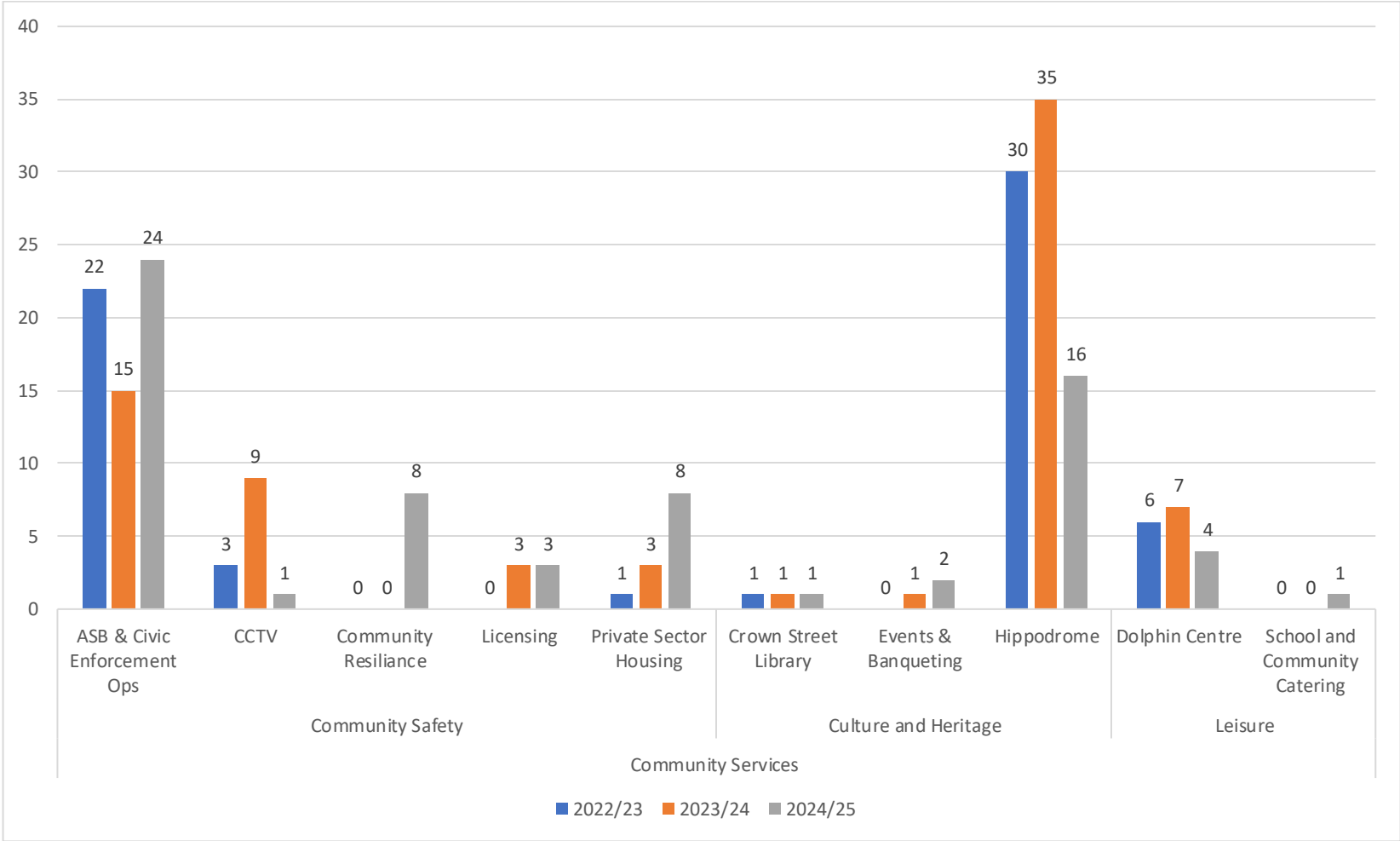
59. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
60. Following a complaint for Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) staff were reminded of the importance of Adult and Children's Services sharing information. Training was also provided on the Local Authority's duties under the Mental Health Act 1983 and the Children with Disabilities Eligibility Criteria.
61. Following a complaint for Inclusion the Vulnerable Pupil Panel Protocol was updated with regard to the Home to Hospital Teaching Service. The Council also reviewed its internal processes to ensure it is able make timely arrangements for the provision of suitable education in accordance with its duties under Section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996.

Services Group

Complaints by Service Area/Team

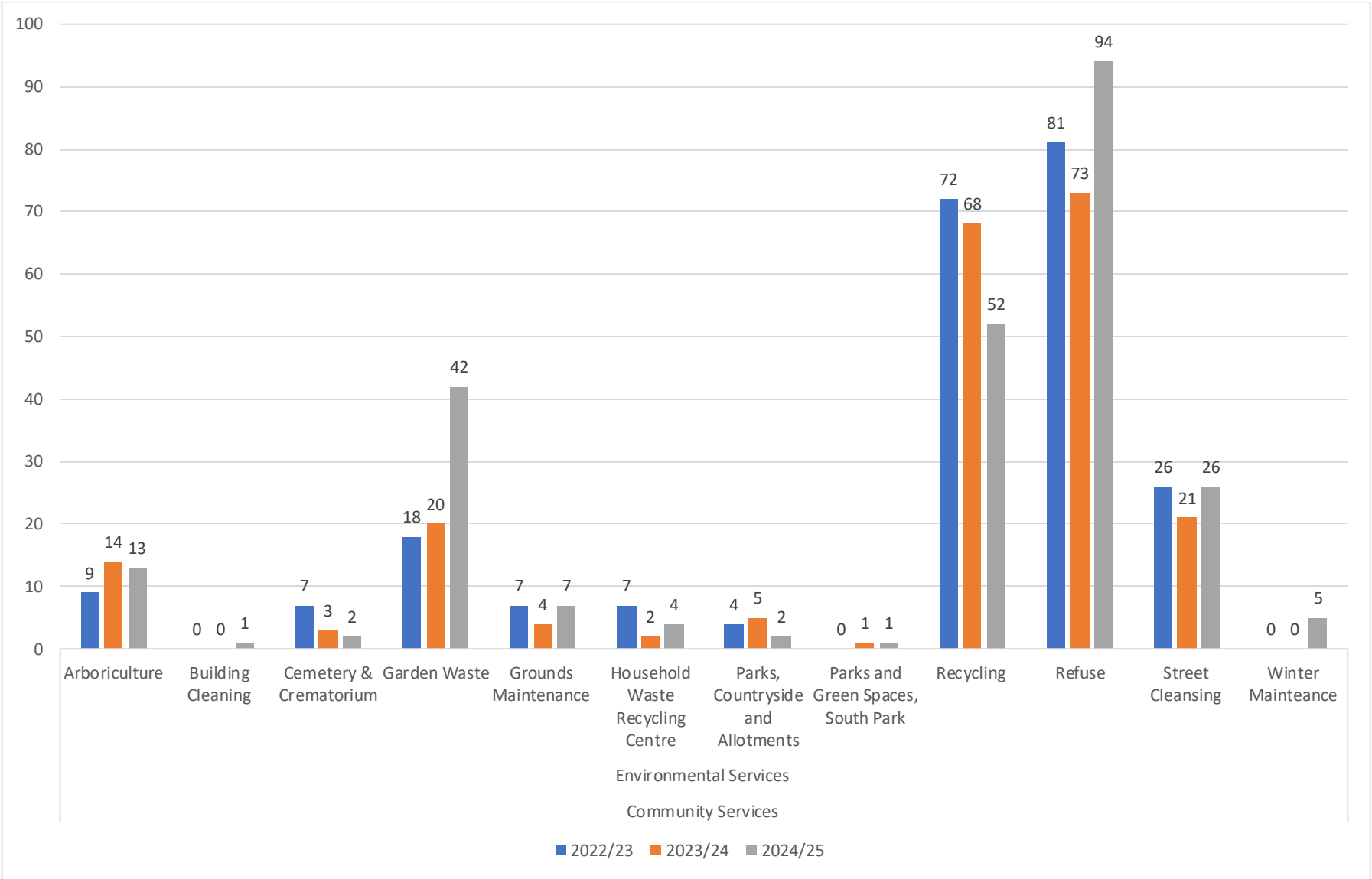
62. Services Group received 348 corporate complaints during 2024/25.

Community Services



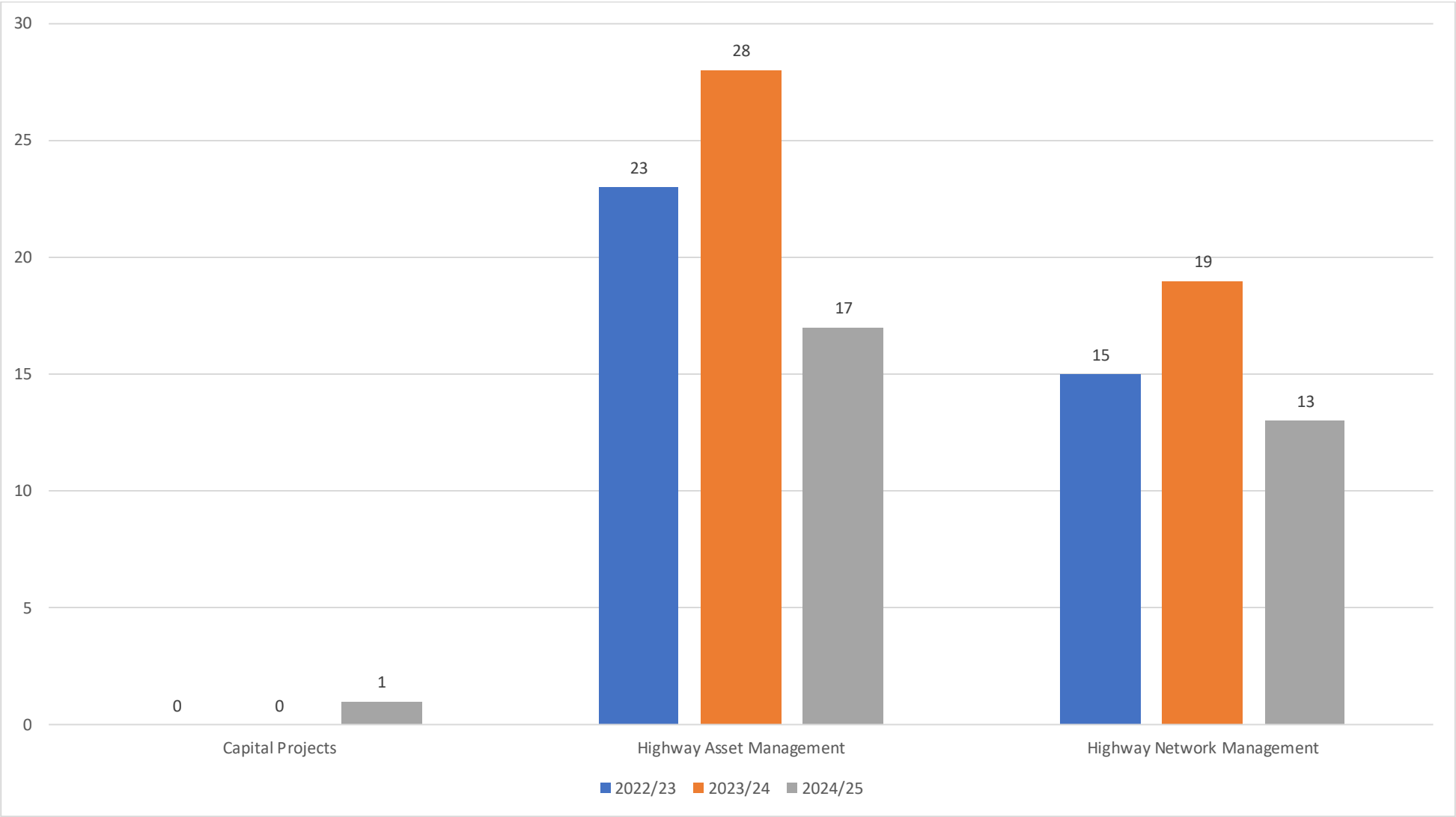
63. Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops received 24 complaints during 2024/25, an increase from 15 in 2023/24. The most common themes were dissatisfaction with a perceived lack of action in relation to requests for enforcement and dissatisfaction with the attitude and actions of enforcement officers.
64. CCTV received one complaint in 2024/25, a reduction from nine in 2023/24.
65. Community Resilience received eight complaints during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24. All the complaints received stemmed from a single incident and concerned the Council's interpretation of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
66. Licensing received three complaints during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
67. Private Sector Housing received eight complaints during 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24. All complaints concerned dissatisfaction with the help provided or a lack of response.
68. Crown Street Library received one complaint during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
69. Events and Banqueting received two complaints during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.
70. Hippodrome received 16 complaints during 2024/25, a significant reduction from 35 during 2023/24. The main cause of complaints was that staff did not adequately address inappropriate behaviour by other audience members during shows.
71. Dolphin Centre received four complaints during 2024/25, a reduction from seven during 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
72. School and Community Catering received one complaint during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Community Services continued...



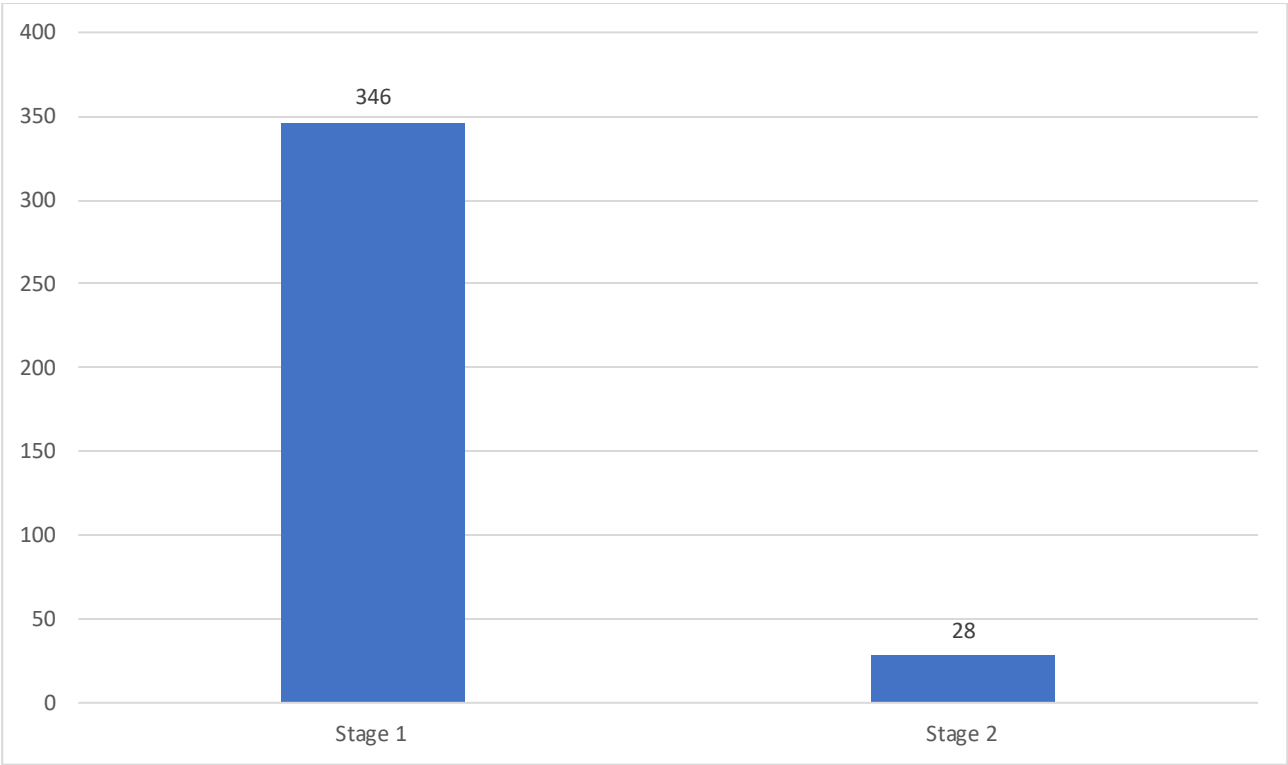
73. Arboriculture received 13 complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 14 in 2023/24. These complaints generally resulted from dissatisfaction with a decision not to undertake works to a tree for the reasons requested.
74. Building Cleaning received one complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
75. Cemetery & Crematorium received two complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from three in 2023/24.
76. Garden Waste received 42 complaints during 2024/25, a significant increase from 20 in 2023/24. Complaints primarily concerned missed collections, including assisted collections and stickers not being delivered in a timely manner.
77. Grounds Maintenance received seven complaints in 2024/25, an increase from four in 2023/24. Dissatisfaction with the grass cutting service was the main cause of complaint.
78. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) received four complaints in 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
79. Parks, Countryside and Allotments received two complaints in 2024/25, a decrease from five in 2023/24.
80. South Park received one complaint in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
81. Recycling received 52 complaints during 2024/25, a significant reduction from 68 in 2023/24. The most common cause of complaint was recycling not being collected and the caddy not being returned after collection.
82. Refuse received 94 complaints during 2024/25, a significant increase from 73 in 2023/24. Complaints primarily related to refuse collections, including assisted collections being missed on one or more occasion and bins not being returned to the position they were put out for collection.
83. Street Cleansing received 26 complaints during 2024/25, an increase from 21 during 2023/24. Complaints primarily related to the lack of response to requests for service.
84. Winter Maintenance received five complaints during 2023/24, an increase from zero in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.

Capital Projects, Building Services, Highways and Transport



- 85. Capital Projects received one complaint in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 86. Highway Asset Management received 17 complaints during 2024/25, a significant decrease from 28 in 2023/24. Themes included delays in responding to requests for service and dissatisfaction with the impact of highway works on individual properties.
- 87. Highway Network Management received 13 complaints during 2024/25, a decrease from 19 in 2023/24. Themes included delays in responding to requests for service and dissatisfaction with decisions in relation to variety of highways issues.

Complaints by Stage

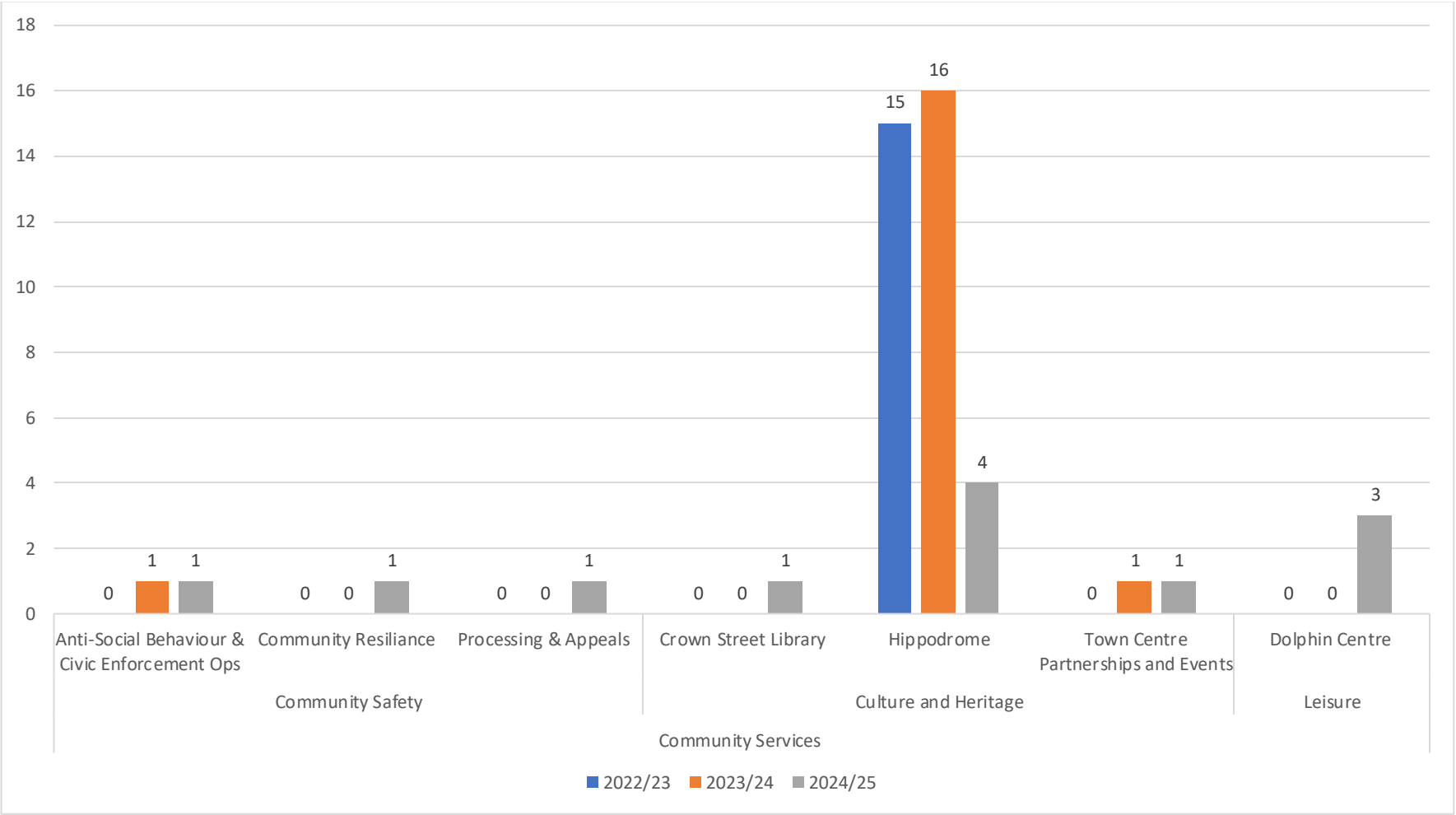


N.B. Two complaints were escalated directly to Stage 2

Compliments by Service Area/Team

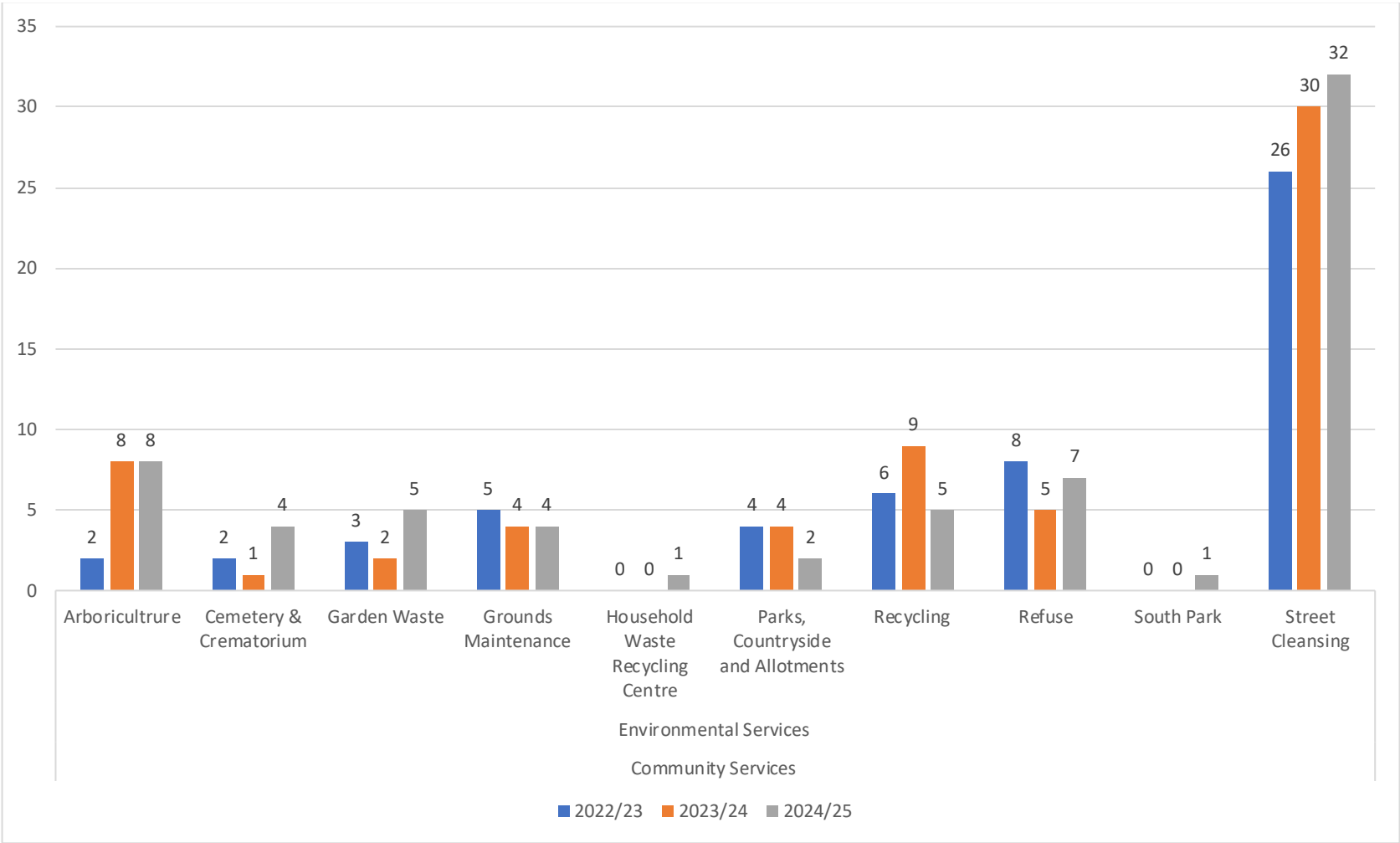
88. Services Group received 87 corporate compliments during 2024/25.

Community Services



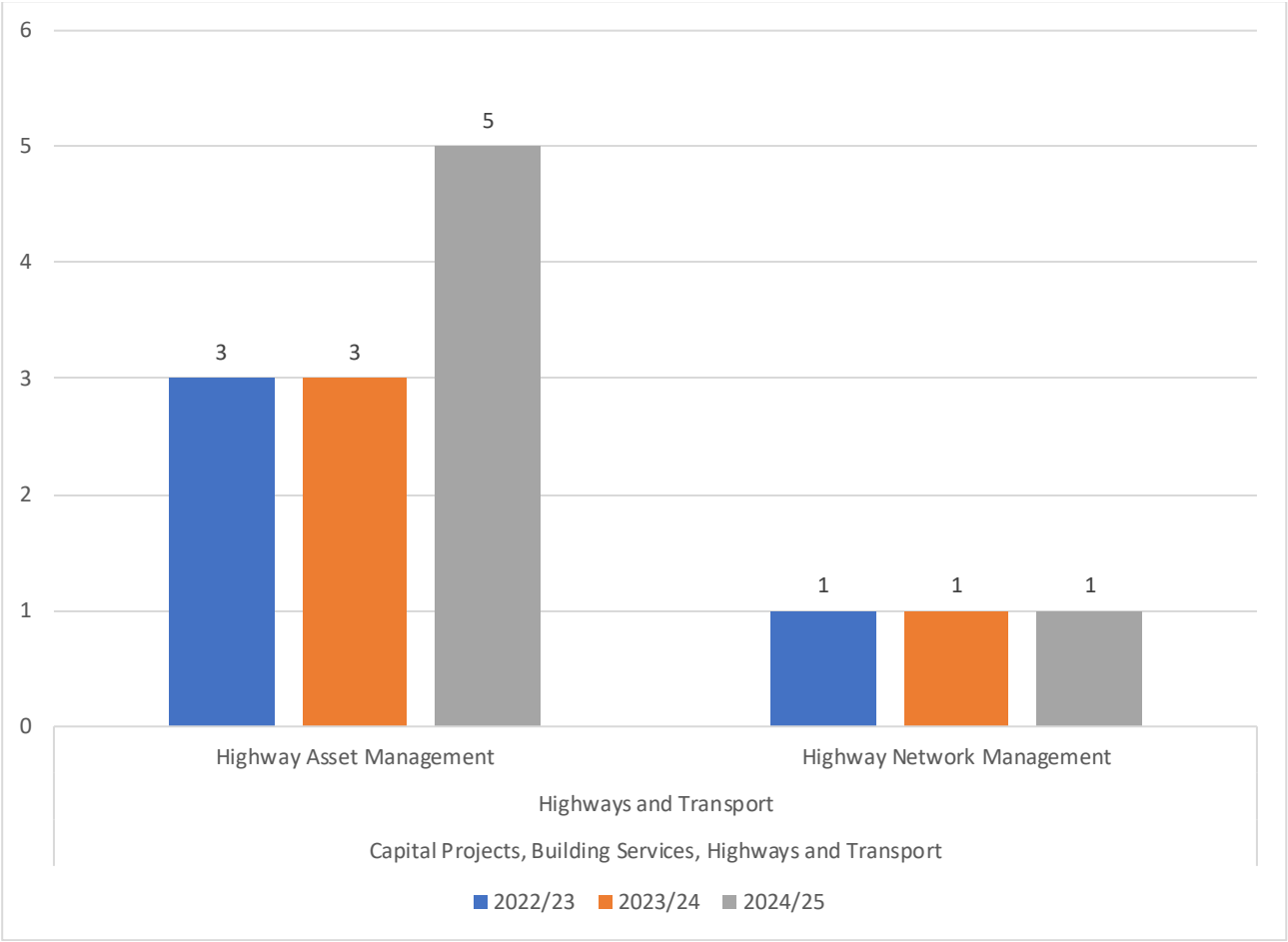
89. Anti-Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Ops received one compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
90. Community Resilience received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
91. Processing & Appeals received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
92. Crown Street Library received one compliment during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
93. Hippodrome received four compliments during 2024/25, a significant decrease from 16 in 2023/24. The most common themes were satisfaction with the level of customer service and support from staff.
94. Town Centre Partnership and Events received one compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
95. Dolphin Centre received three compliments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Community Services continued...



96. Arboriculture received eight compliments in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. The most common theme was satisfaction with tree works.
97. Cemetery & Crematorium received four compliments during 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
98. Garden Waste received five compliments in 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. Compliments concerned people's general satisfaction with the service provided.
99. Grounds Maintenance received four compliments in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. Compliments concerned people's general satisfaction with the service provided.
100. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) received one compliment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
101. Parks, Countryside and Allotments received two compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from four in 2023/24.
102. Recycling received five compliments during 2024/25, a decrease from nine during 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
103. Refuse received seven compliments during 2024/25, an increase from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
104. South Park received one compliment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
105. Street Cleansing received 32 compliments during 2024/25, an increase from 30 in 2023/24. Themes included general satisfaction with the cleanliness of streets and satisfaction with the team's response to specific requests for service.

Capital Projects, Building Services, Highways and Transport

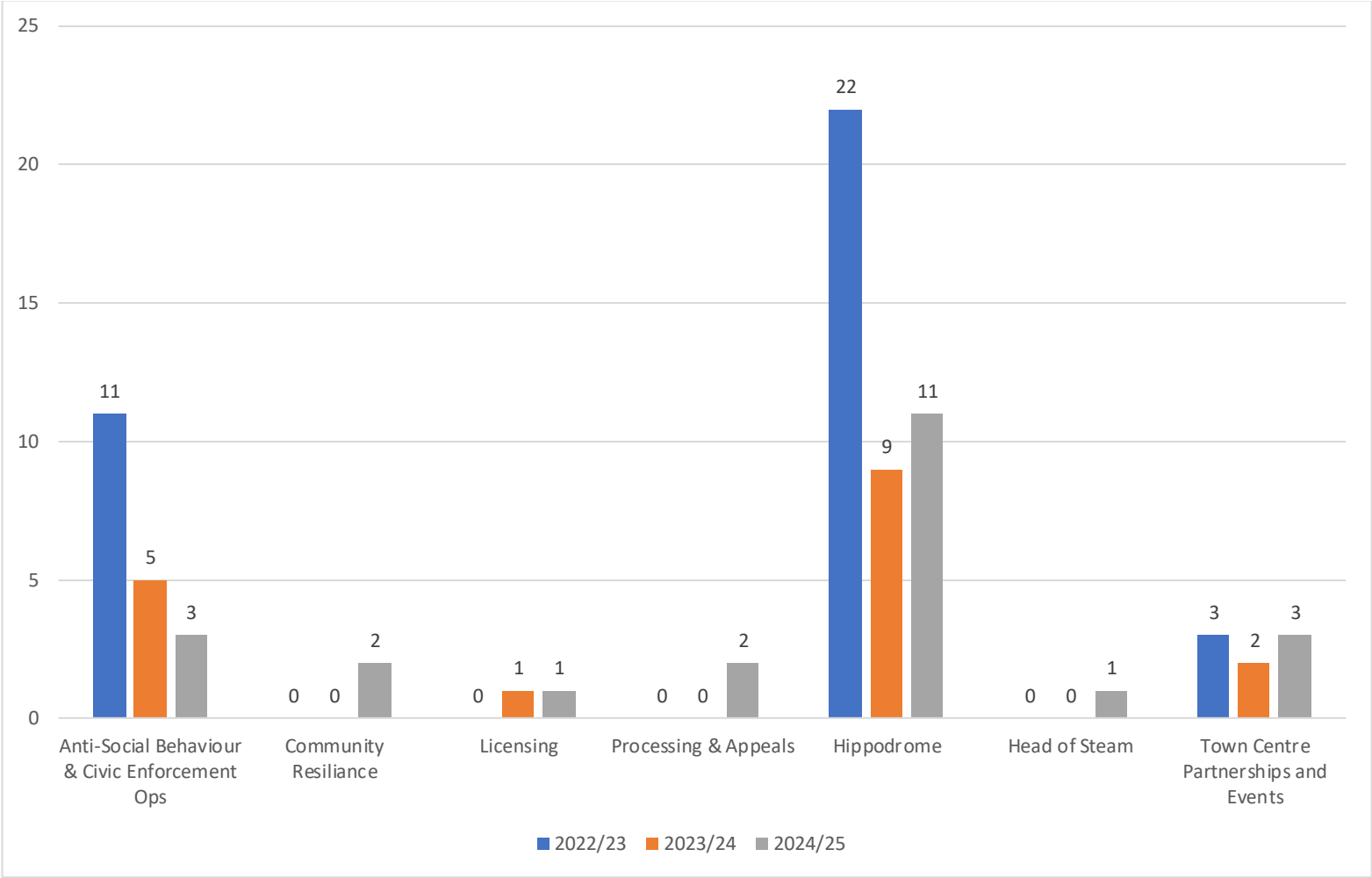


- 106. Highway Asset Management received five compliments in 2024/25, an increase from three in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
- 107. Highway Network Management received one compliment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.

Comments by Service Area/Team

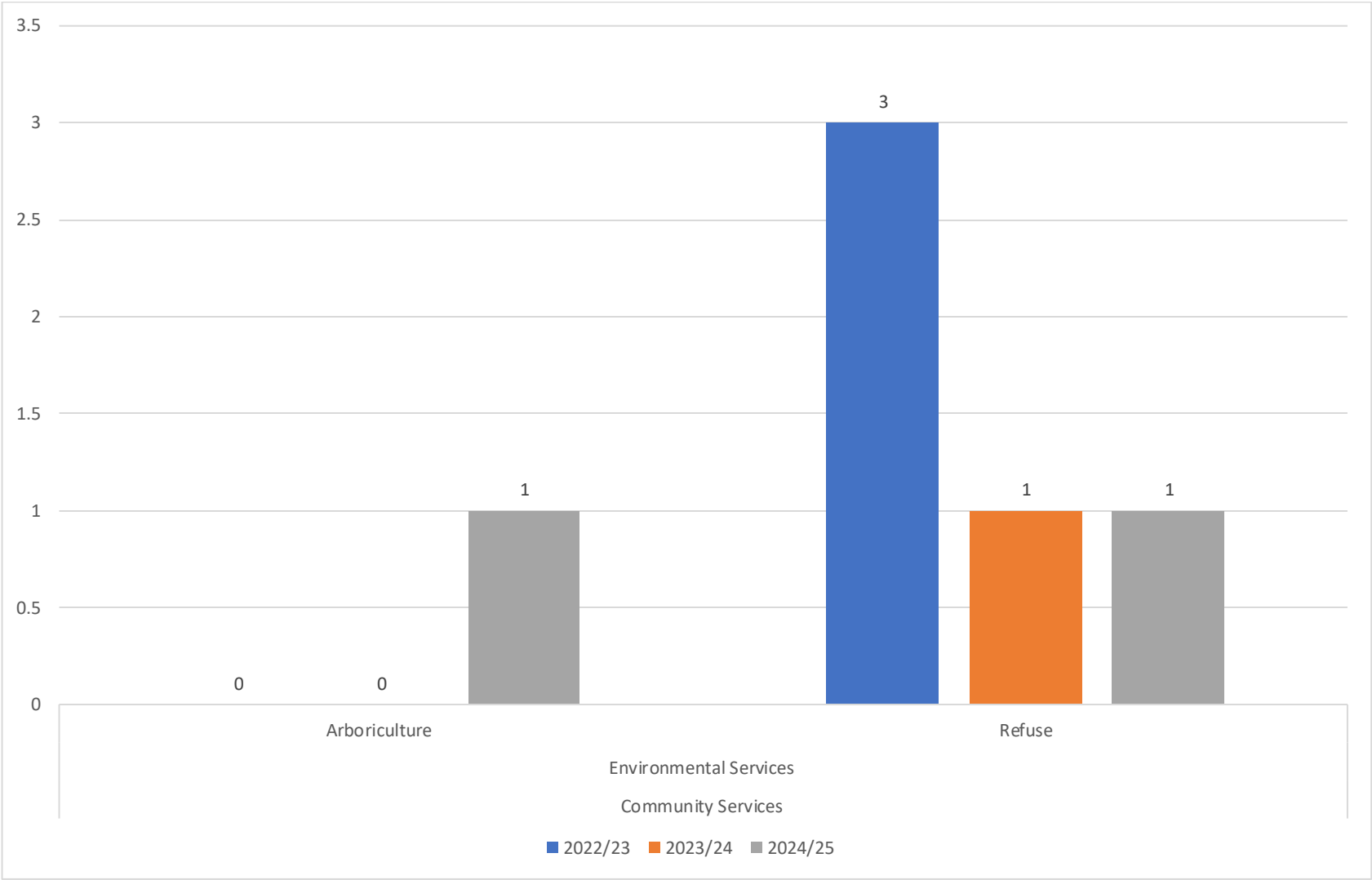
108. Services Group received 38 corporate comments during 2024/25.

Community Services



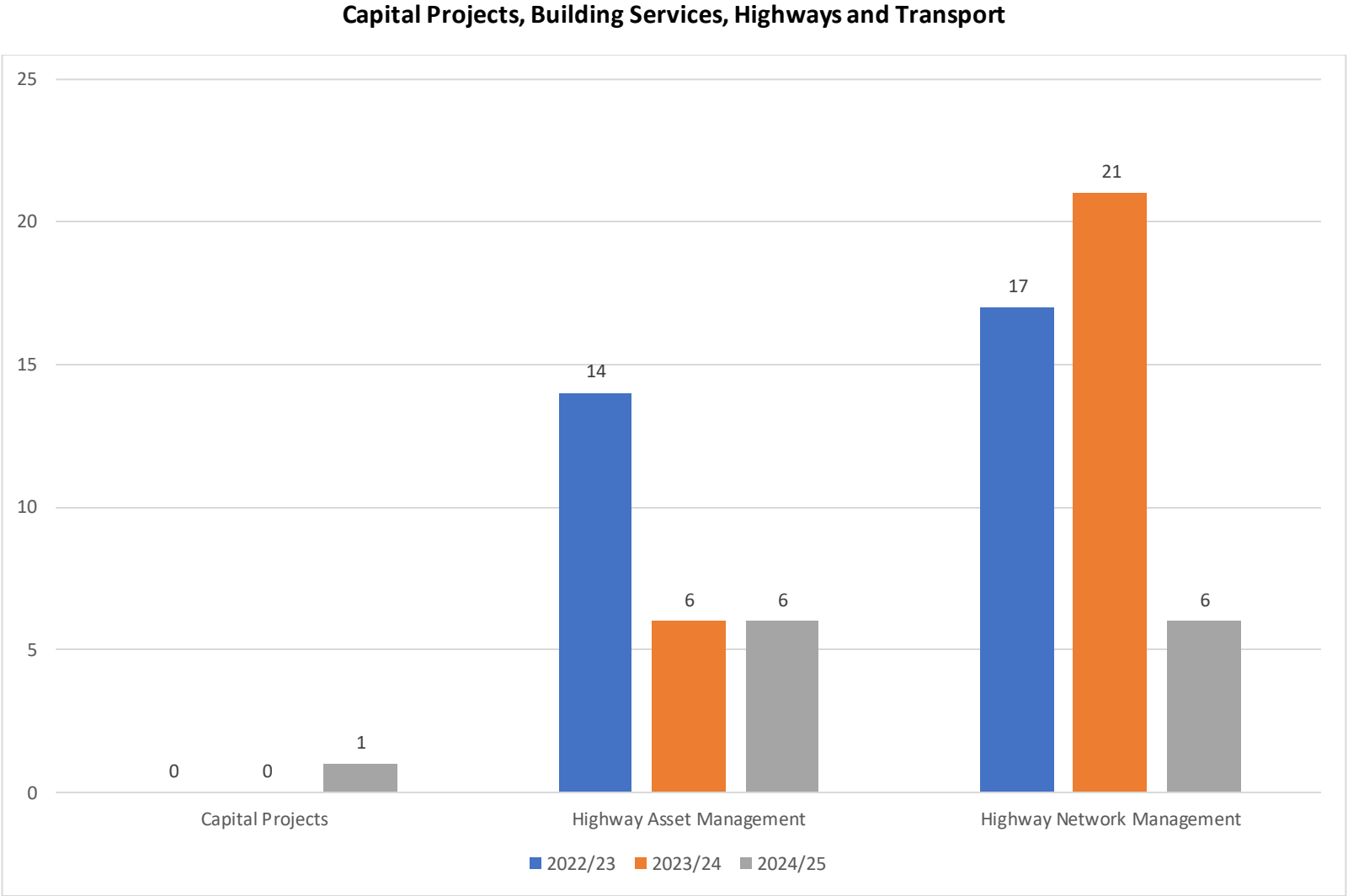
109. Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops received three comments during 2024/25, a reduction from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
110. Community Resilience received two comments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
111. Licensing received one comment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.
112. Processing and Appeals received two comments during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
113. Hippodrome received 11 comments during 2024/25, an increase from nine during 2023/24. Dissatisfaction with quality of shows and disruptive members of the audience were the most common themes.
114. Head of Steam received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
115. Town Centre Partnerships and Events received three comments during 2024/25, an increase from two in 2023/24. Two comments concerned the market and condition of town.

Community Services continued...



116. Arboriculture received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

117. Refuse received one corporate comment in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.



32. Capital Projects received one comment in 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
33. Highway Asset Management received six comments in 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
34. Highway Network Management received six comments during 2024/25, a significant decrease from 21 in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.

Complaints by Outcome

35. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints during 2024/25.

Stage 1 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Escalated to Stage 2 (No S1 Response)	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
CCTV	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Anti-Social Behaviour & Civic Enforcement Ops	0	0	3	6	3	5	17
Processing & Appeals	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Licensing	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Private Sector Housing	0	0	1	2	0	1	4
Hippodrome	0	0	4	3	5	1	13
Crown Street Library	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Arboriculture	2	0	7	0	2	1	12
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Cemetery & Crematorium	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Parks, Countryside and Allotments	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Grounds Maintenance	0	0	1	1	4	1	7
Street Cleansing	1	0	8	3	5	1	18
Garden Waste	0	1	6	0	29	1	37
Recycling	0	13	11	1	24	0	49
Refuse	0	9	34	3	40	3	89
Winter Maintenance and Call Out	0	0	3	0	2	0	5
HWRC	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
School and Community Catering	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dolphin Centre	0	0	1	1	4	0	6
Events & Banqueting	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Highway Asset Management	0	0	7	3	5	0	15
Capital Projects	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Highway Network Management	0	1	7	1	2	0	11
Totals	3	25	100	29	130	14	301

Stage 2 Outcomes

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Processing & Appeals	1	0	0	0	0	1
Private Sector Housing	0	1	0	0	0	1
Arboriculture	0	2	0	1	0	3
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	0	0	1	0	1
Recycling	0	0	0	0	1	1
Refuse	0	0	0	0	2	2
School and Community Catering	0	0	1	0	0	1
Highway Asset Management	0	2	0	0	0	2
Highway Network Management	0	1	1	0	0	2
Totals	1	6	2	2	3	14

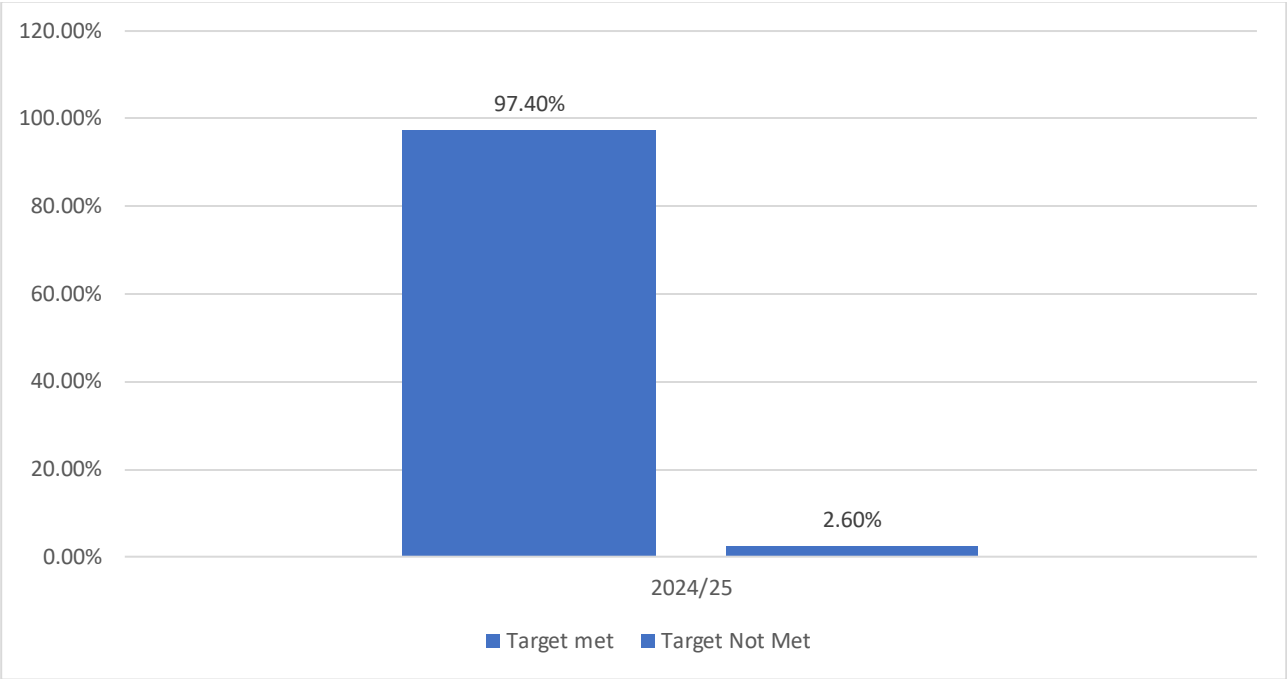
Organisational Learning

36. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, the following organisational learning resulted from the complaint investigations concluded during 2024/25.
37. Following a complaint for Anti Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Ops, officers were reminded of the importance of engaging with motorists within a vehicle which is parked in contravention before issuing a penalty charge notice.
38. Following another complaint for Anti Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Ops, all officers who triage online reports were advised they must, whenever details are available, make contact with those reporting issues before any further action is taken.
39. Following a complaint for the Dolphin Centre a formalised procedure was implemented to ensure that our pensioner swim price is offered to anyone from outside of Darlington on providing evidence of their eligibility for the concession.
40. Following a complaint for Highways Network Management it was agreed the Council would raise awareness of the Customer Standards with officers.
41. As a result of another complaint for Highways Network Management the Council changed the way we manage requests through the Customer Contact Centre to ensure there is management oversight and that all requests are responded to in a timely manner.
42. Following a complaint for Highways Asset Management it was agreed a letter would be sent to residents prior to any future projects to notify them of the works.

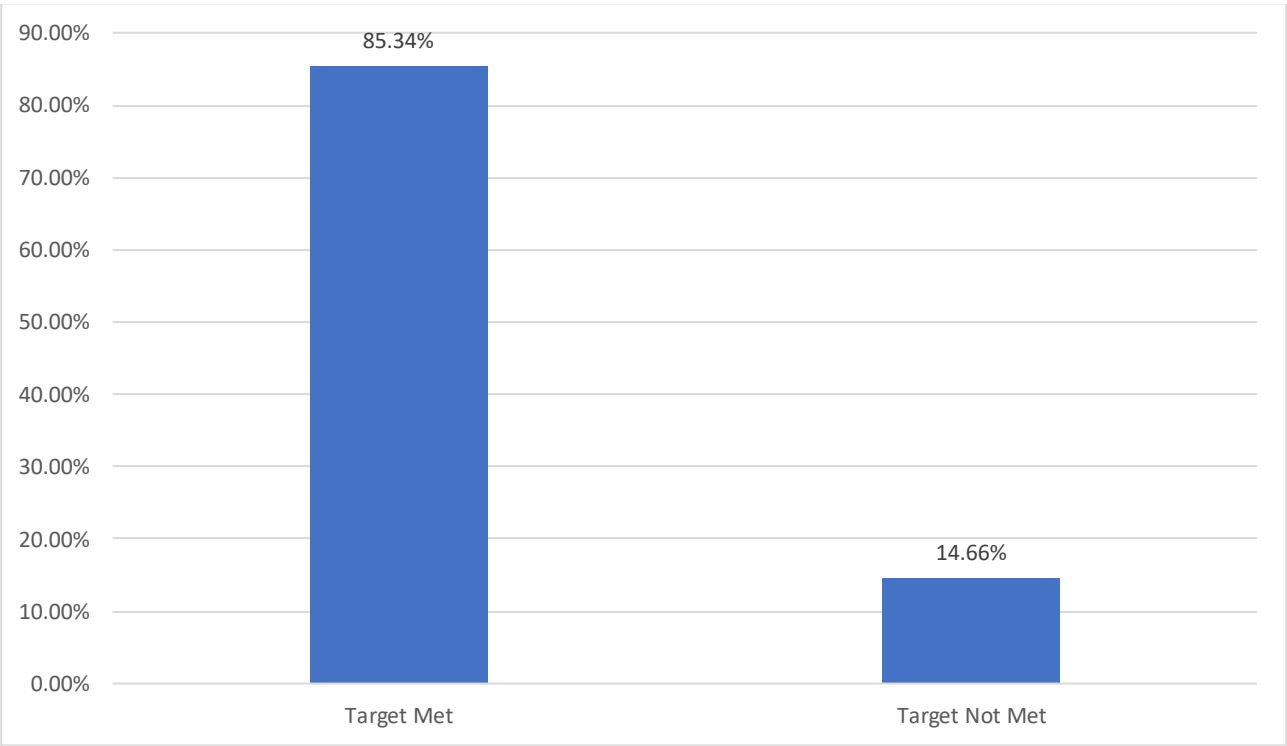
Overall Council Performance against the Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

Stage 1

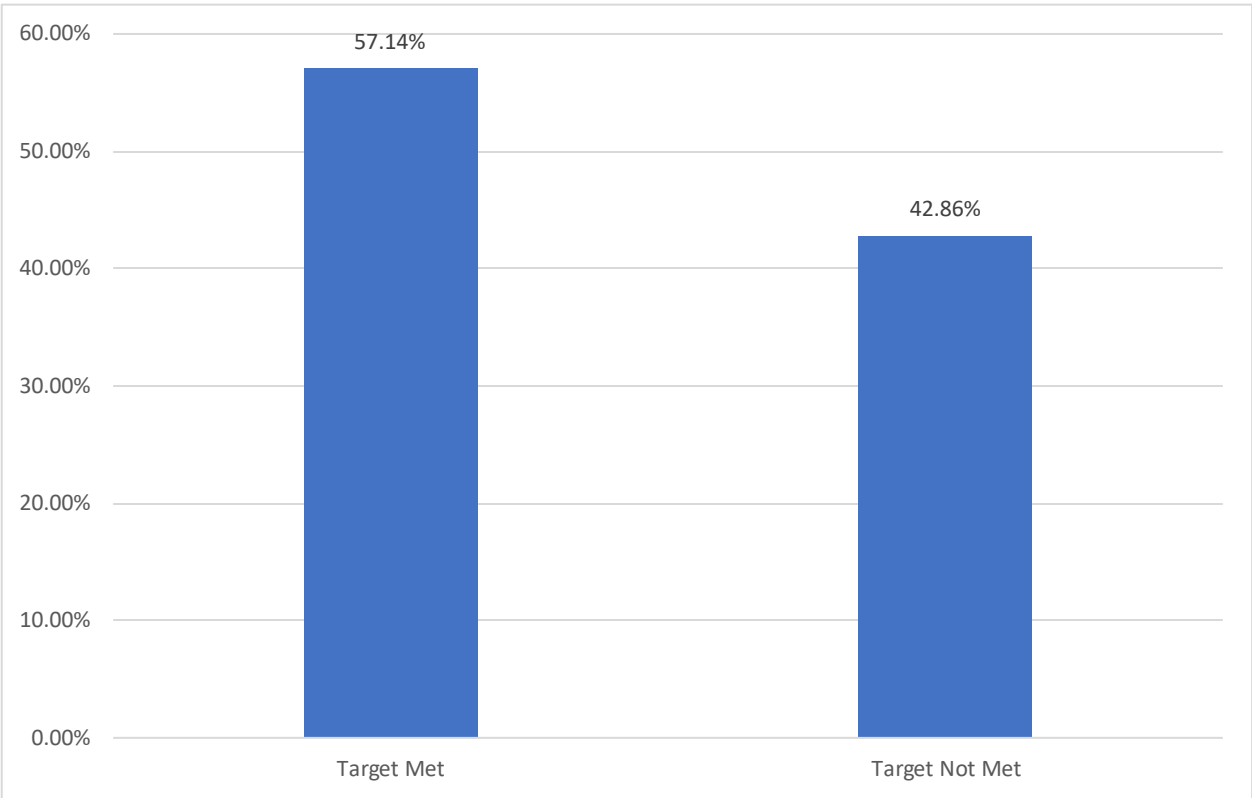
Performance against Stage 1 complaint acknowledgement target (5 working days)



Performance against Stage 1 complaint response target (10 working days)

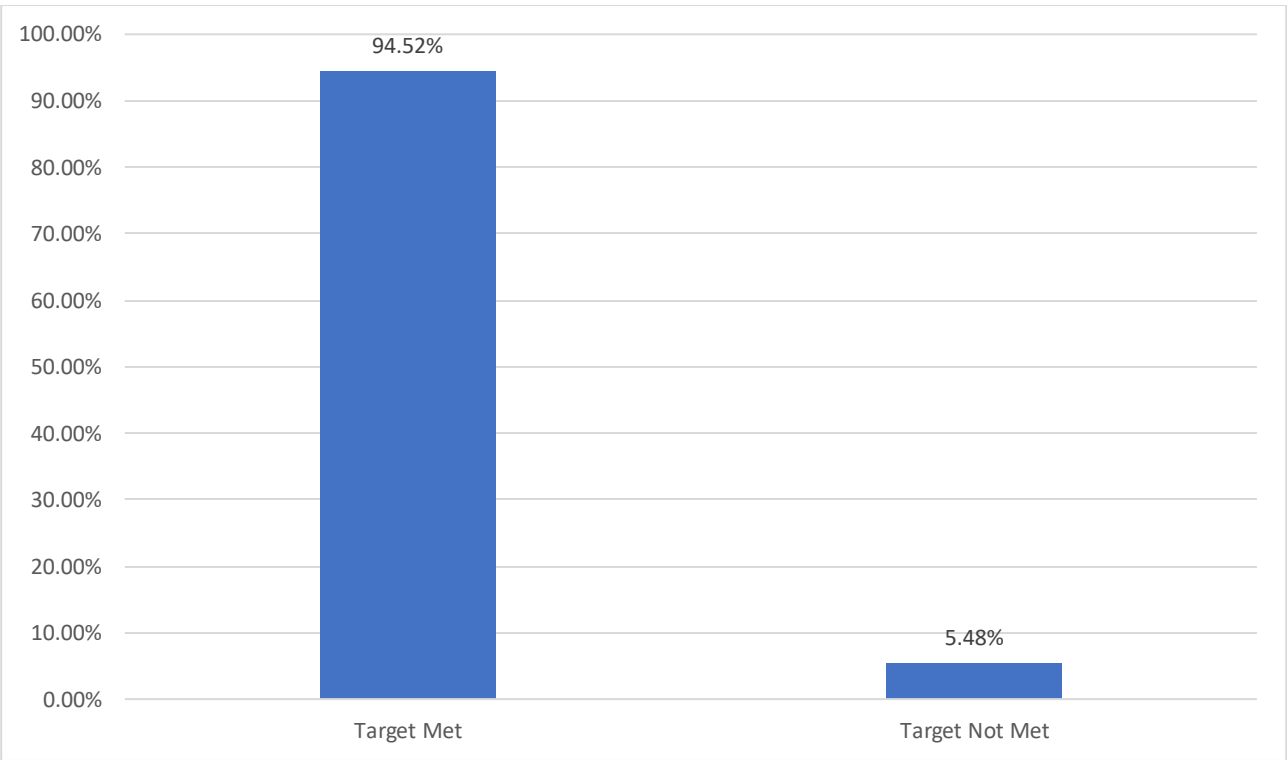


Performance against Stage 1 extended complaint response target (20 working days)

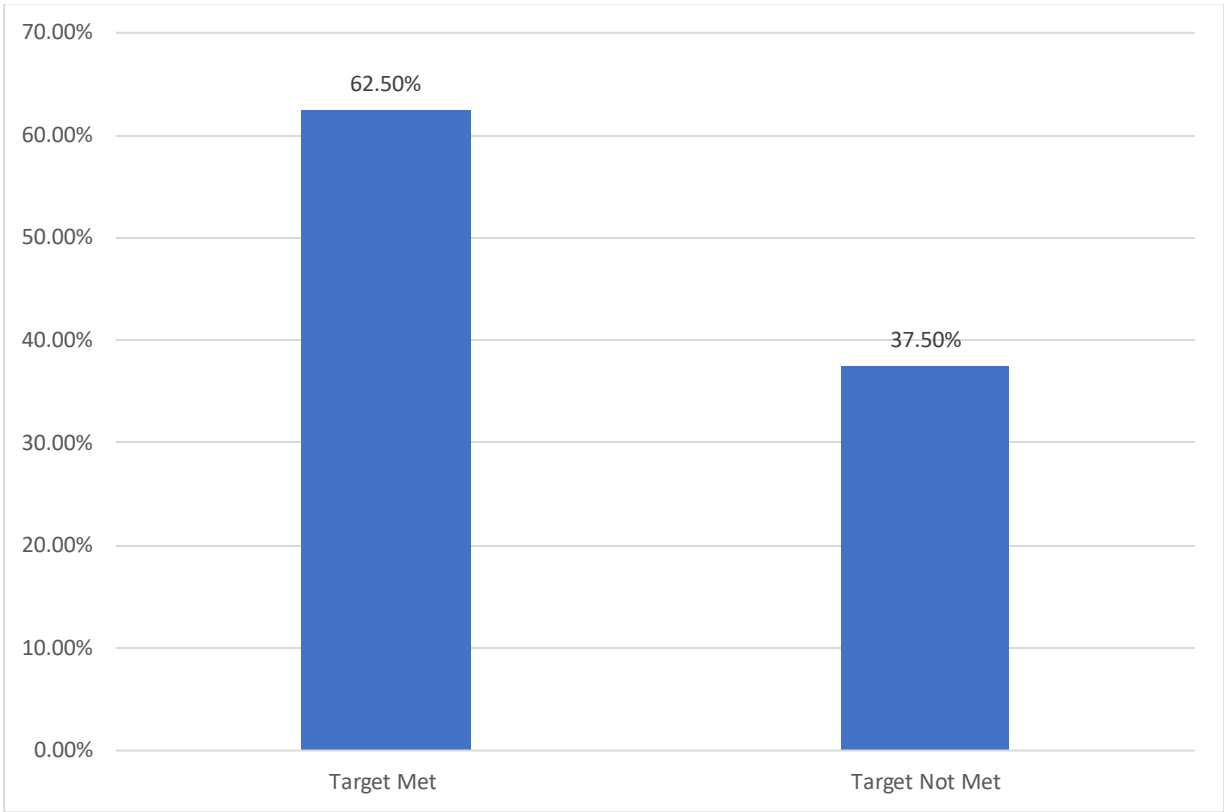


Stage 2

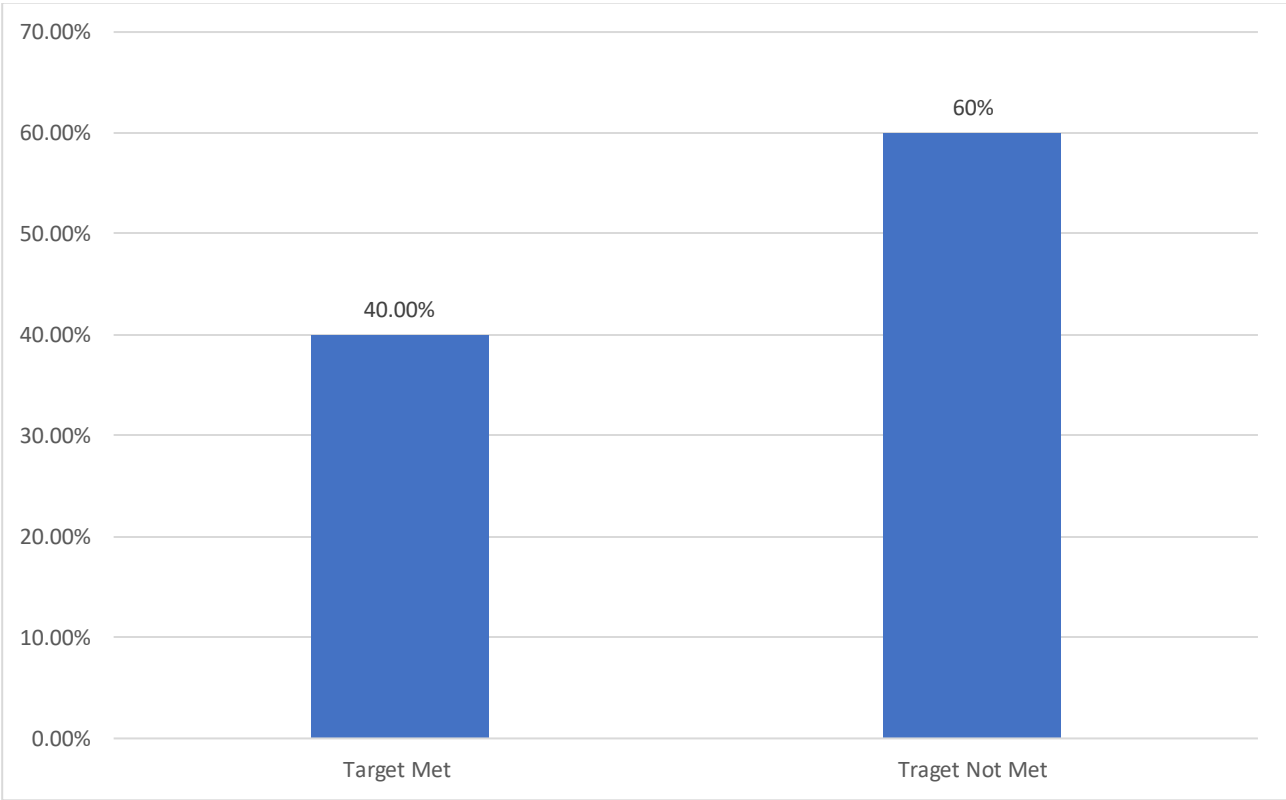
Performance against Stage 2 complaint acknowledgement target (5 working days)



Performance against Stage 2 complaint response target (20 working days)



Performance against Stage 2 extended complaint response target (40 working days)



Further Recommendations

43. The Complaints Manager should provide training for stage 1 responding officers on the updated complaints procedure (introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on 1 April 2024), to improve performance against timescales prior to them being monitored by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from 1 April 2026.
44. The Complaints & Information Governance Team should work to improve compliance with the new Stage 2 timescales (introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on 1 April 2024), prior to the Council's performance against them being monitored by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from 1 April 2026.

Performance against Local Performance Indicators

45. In relation to corporate complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of upheld decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council received two upheld decisions during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24, and an increase from one in 2022/23.
46. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

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Introduction

1. While the Council has produced an annual report, relating to its function as a social landlord for over a decade, this is now a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman's [Complaint Handling Code](#) which became statutory on 1 April 2024. It is also a requirement to submit a self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman and publish a copy of the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints' performance and service improvement report on our website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this. A copy of the self-assessment is contained in the final section of this report.
2. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2024/25 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the procedure) / The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year because of complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend data to improve services. The report also seeks to highlight any areas of good practice and identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so the Council can take action where appropriate to improve services.
3. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This also enables the Council to collect accurate information on complaints in order to identify topics and trends and improve services accordingly.

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

4. The procedure sets out how the Council will deal with complaints, compliments and comments received about the Council as a social landlord (as well as in respect of its ownership and management of leasehold housing).
5. The procedure has 2 stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day-to-day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve most complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure. Housing Services employs a Housing Complaints Officer to assist with delivery of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
6. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints Investigator or Complaints and Information Governance Manager. We may also appoint an independent investigating officer.

7. The Council has appointed the Complaints and Information Governance Manager in line with the Code to be accountable for complaint handling. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager will assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.
8. In addition to this, as required by the Code, the Council has appointed the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues as a member of the governing body (or equivalent) to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').

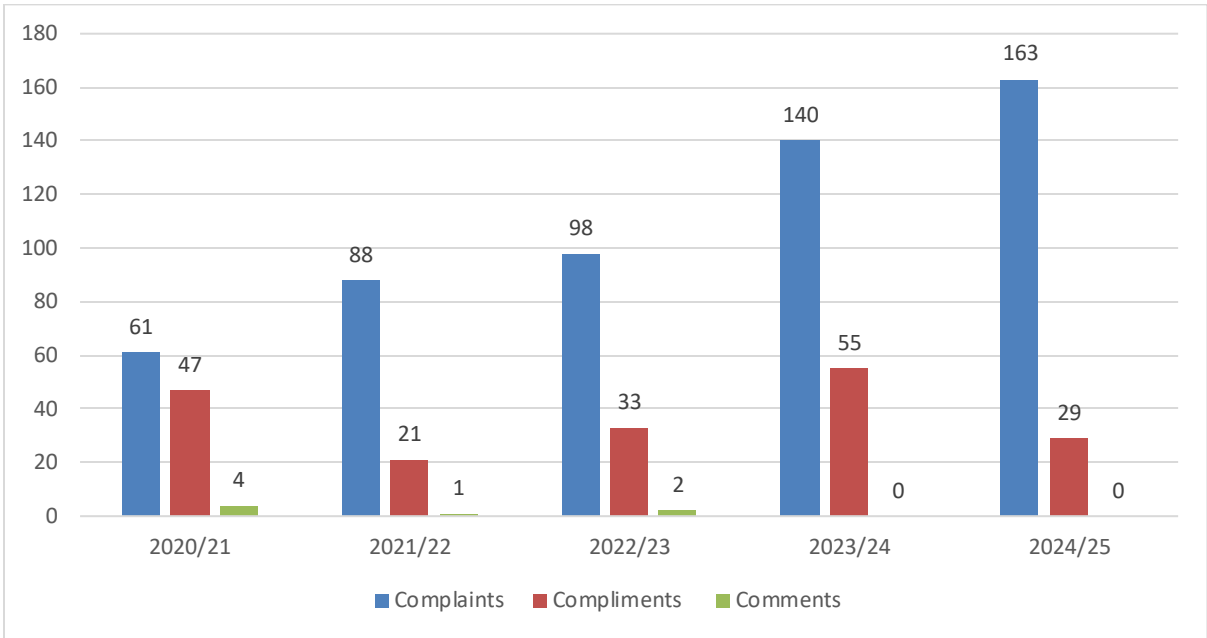
Public Information and Accessibility

9. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages, and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
10. Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
11. The Council can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

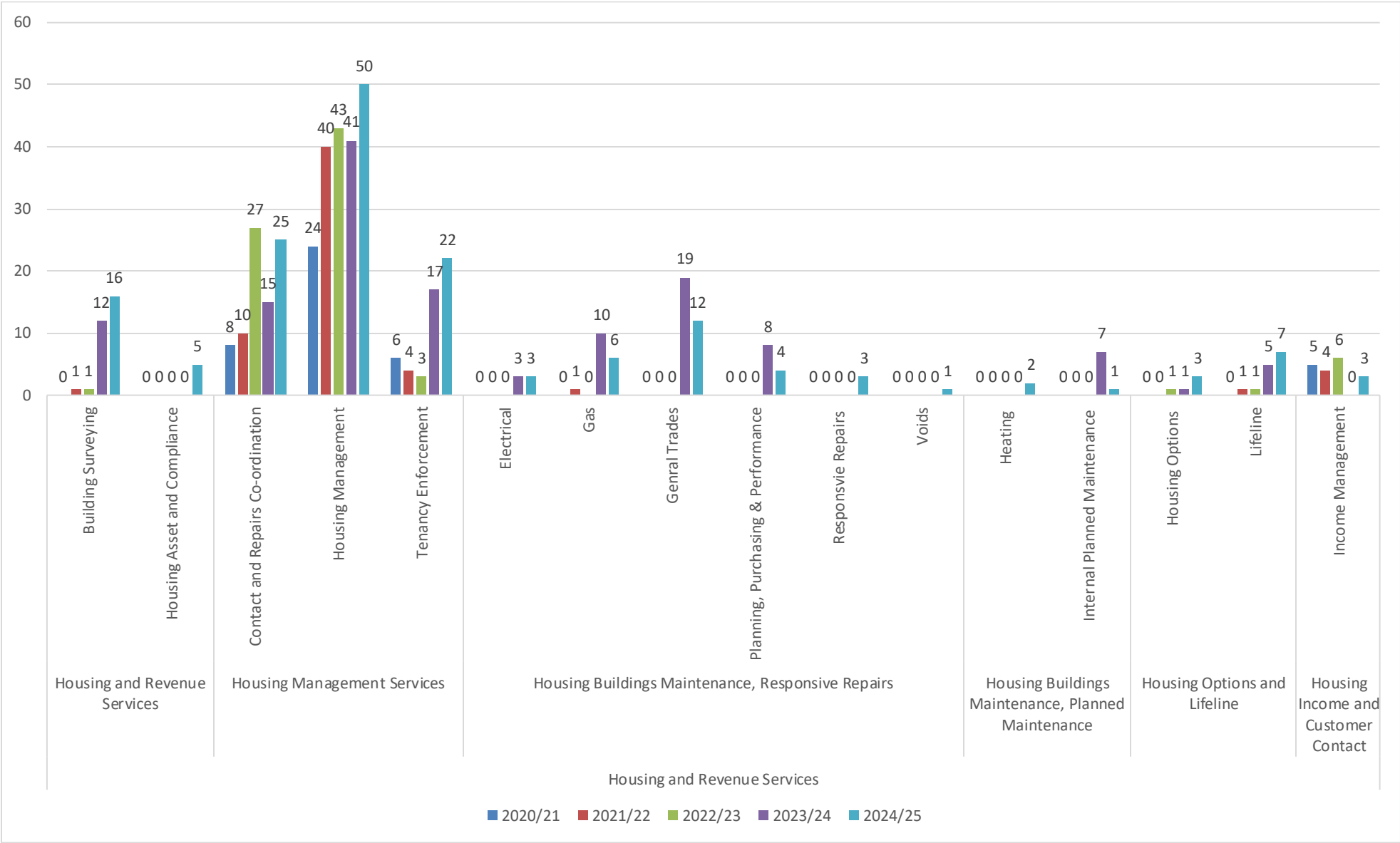
Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments



- 12. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 the Council received a total of 163 complaints under the procedure, an increase from 140 in 2023/24. While this increase can in part be attributed to the additional promotional work undertaken by Housing Services to highlight the complaints procedure and the launch of the Housing Ombudsman’s Statutory Complaints Handling Code on 1 April 2024, it also reflects a national trend with the Housing Ombudsman reporting an unprecedented 474% increase in complaints between 2019/20 and 2024/25, with complaints about repairs accounting for 45%.
- 13. A total of 27 complaints were considered at Stage 2, a decrease from 30 in 2023/24.
- 14. The Council received 29 compliments under the procedure, a decrease from 55 in 2023/24.
- 15. The Council did not receive any comments under the procedure, as was the case in 2023/24.
- 16. The Council did not receive any non-qualifying complaints during 2024/25.

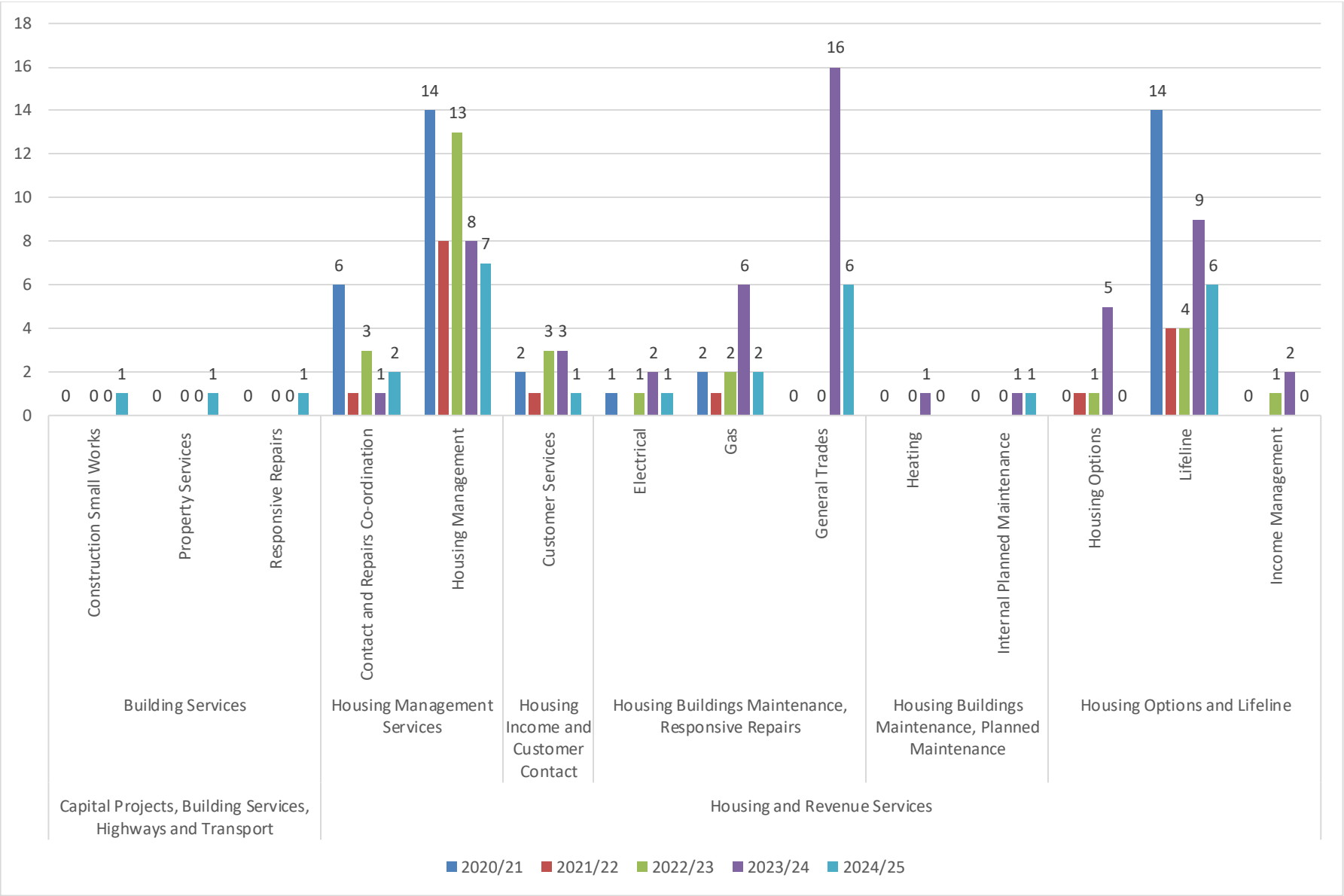
Complaints by Team



17. Building Surveying received 16 complaints, an increase from 12 in 2023/24. The identifiable themes were dissatisfaction with delays in completing repairs and poor communication.
18. Housing Asset and Compliance received five complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
19. Contact & Repairs Co-ordination received 25 complaints, a significant increase from 15 in 2023/24. Again, the identifiable themes were dissatisfaction with delays in completing repairs and poor communication.
20. Housing Management received 50 complaints, an increase from 41 in 2023/24. Complaints concerned dissatisfaction with communication and the support from Housing Management Officers in relation to neighbour nuisance issues and a variety of other housing matters including the timeliness and quality of repairs.
21. Tenancy Enforcement received 22 complaints, an increase from 17 in 2023/24. The identifiable themes were dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of action in relation to reports of anti-social behaviour and the attitude/behaviour of Officers towards complainants.
22. Electrical Services received three complaints, the same number as in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
23. Gas repairs received six complaints, a decrease from 10 in 2023/24. The most common causes of complaint was people's dissatisfaction with the timeliness and quality of repairs.
24. General Trades received 12 complaints, a decrease from 19 complaints in 2023/24. Again, the most common causes of complaint was people's dissatisfaction with the timeliness and quality of repairs.
25. Planning, Purchasing and Performance received four complaints, a decrease from eight in 2023/24. Complaints mainly concerned issues with booking appointments.
26. Responsive Repairs received three complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
27. Voids received one complaint, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
28. Heating received two complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
29. Internal Planned Maintenance received one complaint, a decrease from seven in 2022/23.
30. Housing Options received three complaints, an increase from one in 2023/24.
31. Lifeline received seven complaints, an increase from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.

32. Housing Income Management received three complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Compliments by Team

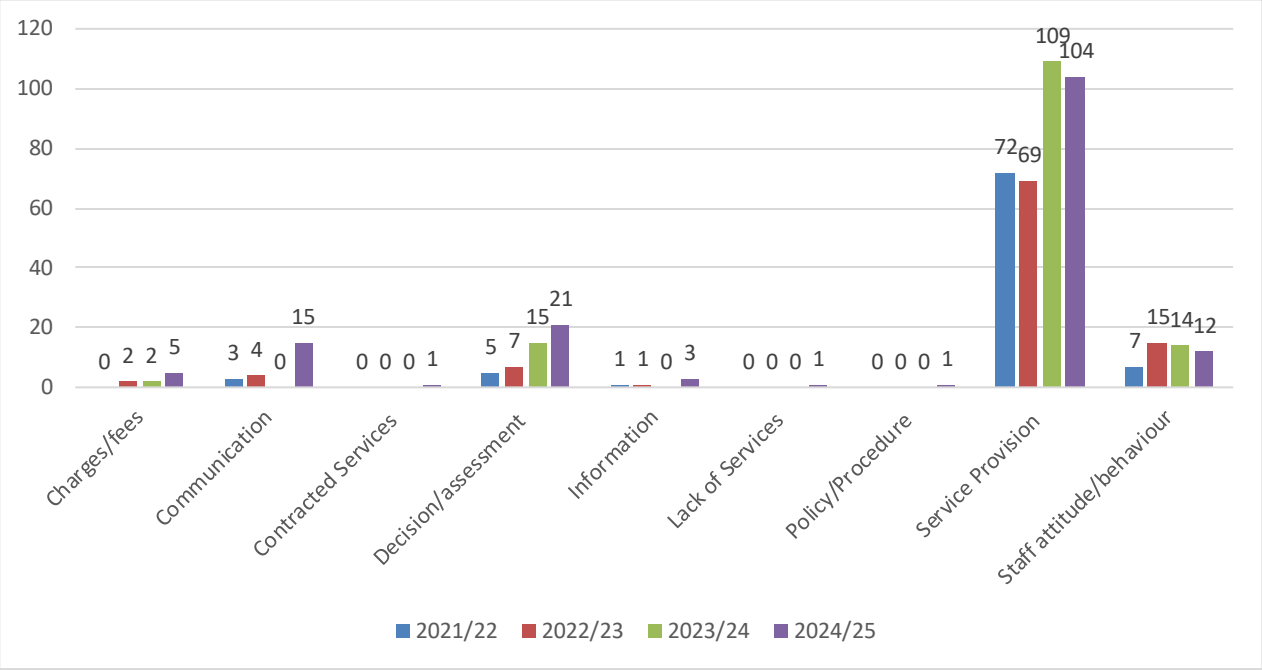


33. Housing Services received 29 compliments, a significant decrease from 55 in 2023/24.

Comments by Team

34. The Council received zero comments during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.

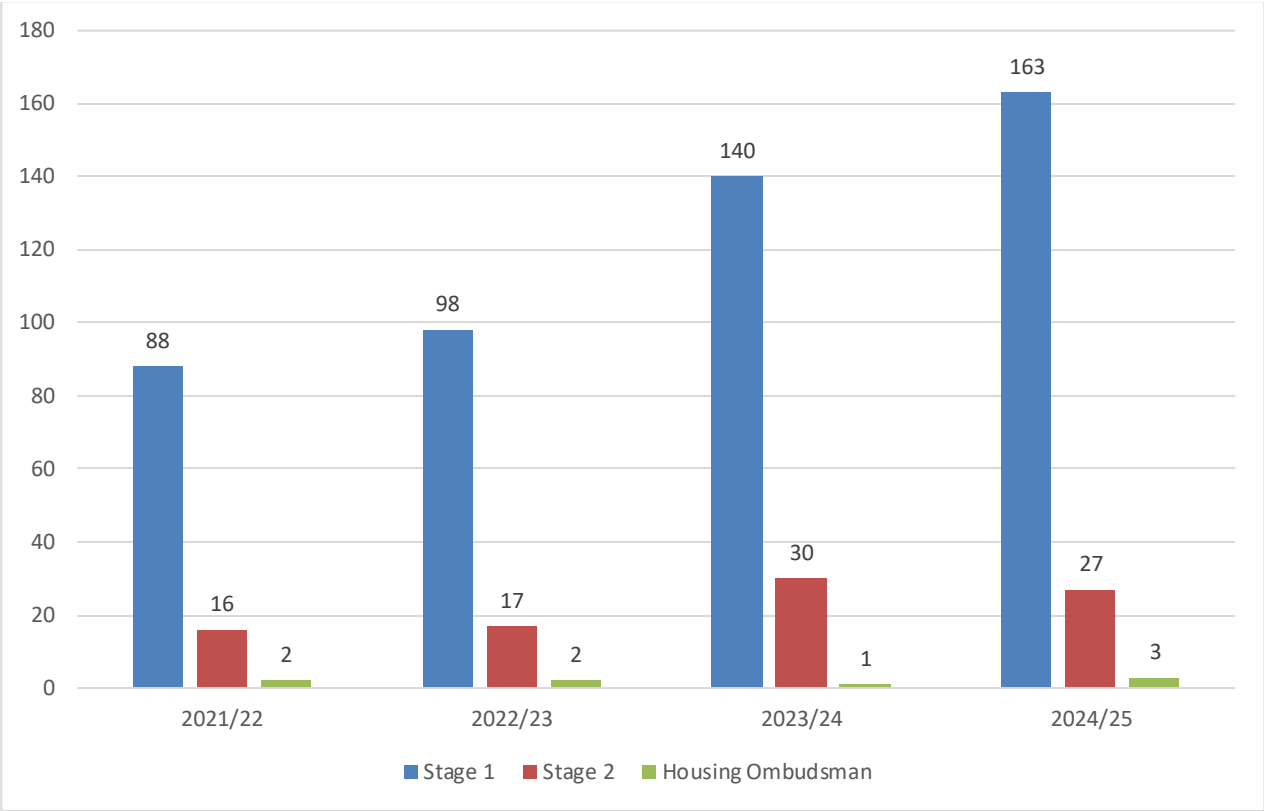
Complaints by Issue



- 35. Five complaints related to charges/fees, an increase from two in 2023/24.
- 36. 15 complaints related to communication, a significant increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 37. One complaint related to Contracted Services, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 38. 21 complaints related to decision/assessment, an increase from 15 in 2023/24.
- 39. Three complaints related to information, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 40. One complaint related to lack of services, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 41. One complaint related to policy/procedure, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 42. There were 104 complaints about service provision, a decrease from 109 in 2023/24.
- 43. 12 complaints related to staff attitude/behaviour, a decrease from 14 in 2023/24.

Complaints by Stage

44. The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during.



45. The Council received 163 Stage 1 complaints in 2024/25, a significant increase from 140 in 2023/24.

46. 27 were investigated at Stage 2, a decrease from 30 in 2023/24.

47. Three complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.

Complaints Outcomes

48. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints received during 2024/25.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Income Management	0	1	2	0	0	3
Housing Management Services	0	2	0	1	0	3
Housing Management	0	19	8	4	9	40
Tenancy Enforcement	1	13	1	1	6	22
Contact and Repairs Co-ordination	0	6	3	4	7	20
Housing Options	0	1	2	0	0	3
Lifeline	0	1	1	1	4	7
Gas	0	1	2	1	1	5
General trades	1	3	1	3	2	10
Voids	0	1	0	0	0	1
Electrical	0	1	1	1	0	3
Planning, Purchasing & Performance	0	2	1	1	0	4
Internal Planned Maintenance	0	0	1	0	0	1
Heating (IPMteam)	0	0	0	0	2	2
Building Surveying	1	3	7	5	0	16
Housing Asset and Compliance	0	3	2	0	0	5
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	58	32	22	31	146
Percentage	2.05%	39.72%	21.91%	15.06%	21.23%	100%

N.B. 18 stage 1 complaints remained open at the time of writing.

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Housing Management	0	2	2	1	0	5
Tenancy Enforcement	0	4	0	0	0	4
General trades	0	0	1	0	0	1
Building Surveying	0	0	3	1	0	4
Housing Asset and Compliance	0	1	0	0	1	2
Totals	0	7	6	2	1	16
Percentage	0%	43.75%	37.5%	12.5%	6.25%	100%

N.B. 11 stage 2 complaints remained open at the time of writing.

Housing Ombudsman

49. The Housing Ombudsman commenced three investigations during 2024/25.
50. The Housing Ombudsman made a decision in relation to one of those complaint investigations it commenced during 2024/25.
51. Full details of any complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Organisational Learning

52. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints and Information Governance Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2024/25, some of which are detailed below:

Building Surveying

53. Following a complaint about the gas servicing process it was agreed the process and letters would be reviewed with a view to improving communication between teams and tenants and ultimately the timeliness in which repairs are completed. It was also agreed to discuss the gas servicing process with the Tenant's Panel and seek their views on what we could have done differently.
54. After receiving a complaint about contractors not being aware of tenant vulnerabilities, staff were reminded to ensure they are updating the Vulnerability User defined Characteristic (UDC) on the internal ICT system so that all staff are aware and to include this information on all orders for contractors where appropriate.
55. Following a complaint about staff conduct, a staff member was briefed on the appropriate way to handle conflict and the need to always remain professional.
56. Housing Services would implement improvements for the roofer's record keeping via Accuserv (repairs appointment ICT system).
57. Following a complaint about a lack of information being provided to a tenant after a fire, it was agreed a post-fire procedure would be written.

Contact and Repairs Co-ordination

58. Following a complaint about missed issues, staff were reminded of the need to ensure they read and address all aspects of service requests from tenants to ensure they feel listened to fully.
59. Staff were reminded to ensure they are listing all issues mentioned by the tenant when an inspection is raised. In this instance the tenant had mentioned their floor tiles had lifted, the rubber door threshold had perished and that they had damp and mould, however, only a damp and mould inspection ticket was raised.
60. Following a complaint about delays in a tenant receiving additional keys, the key-cutting process was reviewed to ensure tenants are aware of the duration to obtain keys and deliver them.

61. After a complaint was received about delays in responding to tenants' queries, staff were reminded to return phone calls within the 7 working days outlined in the Customer Standards.

Gas

62. From a complaint about a delay to gas appliances being safety checked in a new tenancy, a new void process was agreed where the electrical check is completed a week prior to the gas check & key exchange.

General Trades

63. Following a complaint about not responding to a tenant's queries in a timely manner, the team were reminded to check voicemails/ messages and ensure they return any missed messages following leave/absence.
64. After a complaint about delays to emergency repairs, staff were reminded that urgent works need to be rang through to the Planners for an urgent appointment to prevent further damage occurring.

Housing Management

65. Following a complaint about a letter received by a tenant, Housing Officers were asked to make sure they knock on doors when hand delivering letters and ensure the letters are signed.
66. Following a complaint about the repairs process, the team were reminded to ensure they are manually completing any jobs that require follow-on work to prevent any subsequent reminder letters being sent in error.
67. Building Surveyors were reminded that they should be liaising with tenants regarding the outcome of inspections/works involving contractors to ensure a transparent service to tenants, this was following a complaint about lack of communication after an inspection.
68. After a complaint about fly-tipping, staff were reminded to ensure that when items are reported to be fly tipped in communal spaces they arrange for disposal in the first instance to ensure we are working in line with the fire and fire door safety guidelines.

Income Management

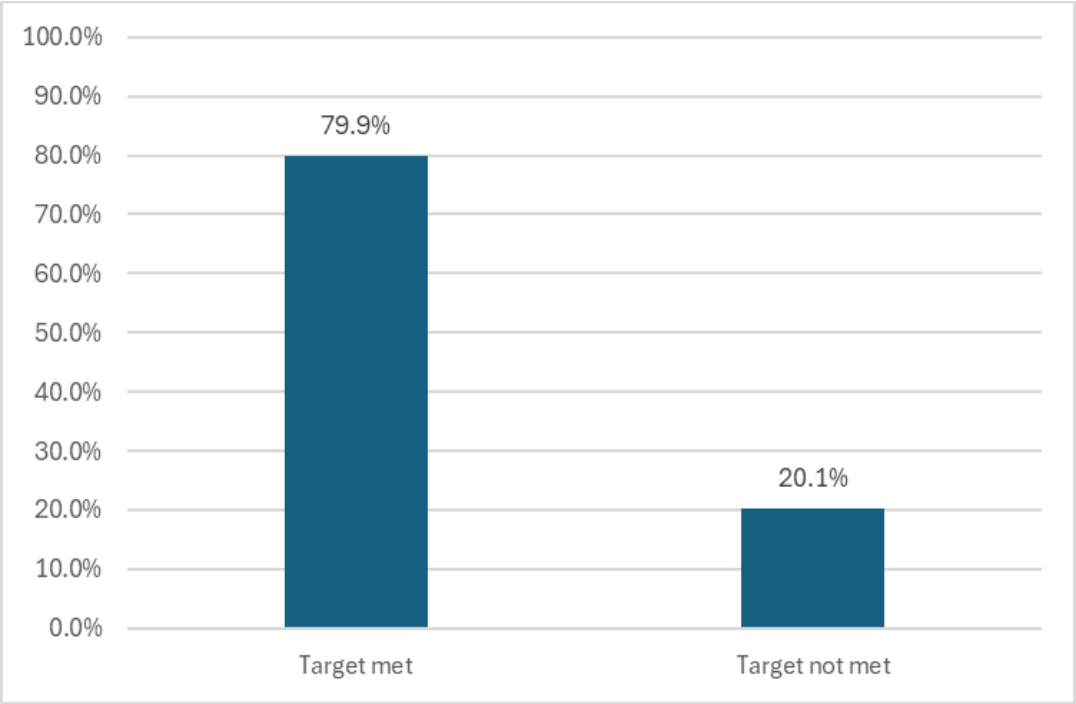
69. Following a complaint about delays to a complaint being logged and subsequently responded to, Housing Income Management were made aware that the Complaints Team need consent from a tenant in order to accept a complaint from a third party. They were reminded that the Housing Services Access to Personal Information form should be completed, but also that the form required updating to ensure it reflected the more

stringent consent requirements introduced by UK GDPR and those detailed in our Housing Complaints Procedure.

Performance against the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

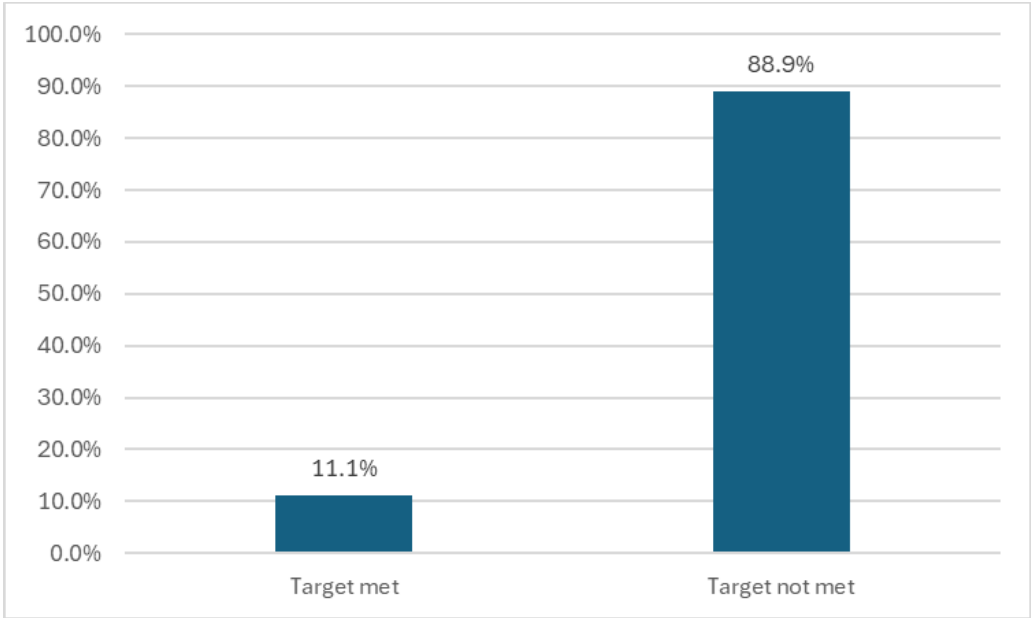
Stage 1

Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales



Stage 2

Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales



70. The Regulator of Social Housing has issued guidance on how to calculate the above, which means the methodology used now differs from that previously used, and that currently used in relation to all other Council complaints. We have applied this same methodology to the reporting of Housing Ombudsman decisions in this report; however, we do not intend to adopt it elsewhere.
71. The methodology identifies the percentage of complaints ***made by tenants during the reporting*** year that were responded to in timescale during the reporting year, as opposed to the overall percentage of complaints responded to in timescale during the reporting year. Consequently, any complaints received in 2023/24 and responded to in 2024/25 are excluded from the calculation. As are any complaints received in 2024/25 that remained open after the 31 March 2025.

Further recommendations

72. Housing Services should consider what can be done to reduce complaints about the timeliness and quality of repairs and poor communication and to improve relationships between officers and tenants.
73. Housing Services should consider reviewing resources to ensure all stage 1 complaints are responded to within Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales.
74. The Complaints & Information Governance Team should consider reviewing resources to ensure all stage 2 complaints are responded to within Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales.

Housing Ombudsman Code Self-Assessment

75. This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.
76. Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.
77. Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.
78. We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'</i>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 3
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council has adopted the definition in 1.2 which does not require a resident to use the complaint. Nor did our previous definition. This is covered in our training.

	the landlord's complaints policy.			
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council has separate and robust processes in place to consider requests for service and complaints.
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This happens as a result of the aforementioned process and is covered in our training.
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.	Yes		Details of how to complain are included in our Satisfaction Surveys.

Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
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2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council's approach has always been based on best practice and we look for every reason to accept a complaint, before deciding it does not qualify for investigating. Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.2	<p>A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. • Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court. • Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of		Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7

	the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.			
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7

Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Complaints compliments and comments	

	of residents who may need to access the complaints process.			
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Training provided to officers.
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1
3.6	Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 8

	on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.			
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 12. This is also included response and extension letters

Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 2.
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes		The Council's Complaints Manager, Complaints Investigator and the Housing Complaints Officer have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints and have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	See Section 1 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council's culture in respect of complaints handling is detailed in its procedures, annual reports and its reports to its Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet . All staff are suitably trained. The sufficiency of resources is subject to the budget constraints of the Local Authority.
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Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1.2
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 6.5
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 6.5
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We set this out in our acknowledgment letters
5.8	At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position; 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	All complaint handlers are appropriately trained to ensure complaints are handled in this manner.

	<p>c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and</p> <p>d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.</p>			
5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council informs the resident the date by which they can expect a response in the extension letter/email. Where the resident requires more frequent updates we agree this on an individual basis.
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 10
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	On the rare occasion we may refuse to escalate a complaint, for example where the resident or the Council has commenced legal proceedings in relation to the matter being complained about, we would explain this to the resident in writing and advise them of their right

				to refer the matter to the HOS.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 17 of the Complaints Procedure. This information is held in the Council's Complaints Management Database. Some information is also held on the tenancy record.
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints)	See Section 13
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 16 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council operates an Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Procedure and an Employee Protection Register to manage unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives.
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Equality information	

Section 6: Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s)	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

	must be clearly explained to the resident.			
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.6	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Response are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
6.7	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which assist complaints officers in ensuring they address all points raised in the complaint definition.
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is something we have always done and will continue to do.

6.9	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.
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Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11

	Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.			
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.17	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Complaint responses are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the

	Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			Council's complaint management system.
6.18	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is standard investigative practice and something we do in all cases. We have template response letter and investigation report templates and good investigative practice guidance for complaints officers to ensure this happens. Complaints Officers also receive training on good investigative practice.
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.
6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	All officers involved are consulted and the Assistant Director are

	members needed to issue such a response.			given the opportunity to comment on the response/provide any further evidence that may lead the complaints office to a different conclusion prior to the response being sent.
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Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	<p>Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologising; • Acknowledging where things have gone wrong; • Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons; • Taking action if there has been delay; • Reconsidering or changing a decision; • Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum; • Providing a financial remedy; • Changing policies, procedures or practices. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13
7.3	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. All remedy actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint

	followed through to completion.			management system.
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Complaints officers use the HOS Guidance on Remedies.

Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include: a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept; c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman; d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	
8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's		Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025	The annual report is also considered by Council Officers at the Chief Officers Board.

	response to the report must be published alongside this.		Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	See this document	This is our annual return and is being completed shortly after the recent restructure of Housing Services
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	Yes		
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.	Yes		

Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints

	to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.			procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	See Section 14 of the complaints procedure. The report is also considered by the Chief Officer's Board and the Tenant's panel.
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1. This is the Complaints and Information Governance Manager
9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1. This is the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues Services

9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	Regular information is also provided to the MRC and they have regular contact with the Complaints and Information Governance Manager.
9.7	As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive: a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	The MRC receives all of the items listed and has direct access to all officers as the relevant Assistant Director.
9.8	Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to: a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; b. take collective responsibility for any	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

	shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.			
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DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

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Introduction

1. The purpose of this annual report is to inform service users, carers, the public, Council Members and staff of the effectiveness of the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the Procedure).
2. On the 1 April 2013 the NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 (the Regulations) came into force. Part five of the Regulations deals with Complaints about Public Health Functions of Local Authorities.
3. The Council implemented a new procedure providing a local framework to ensure complaints are handled effectively and in line with the regulations.
4. The procedure aims to:
 - (a) Make it as easy and accessible as possible for service users and their carers to raise complaints;
 - (b) Foster an organisational culture in which complaints are accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently as possible;
 - (c) Ensure high levels of customer satisfaction with complaints handling;
 - (d) Resolve individual issues when they arise and reduce the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman; and
 - (e) Enable the Council to identify topics and trends in relation to Public Health complaints and improve services as a result.
5. The Chief Executive is designated as the 'Responsible Person' for ensuring compliance with the arrangements made under the Regulations, and in particular ensuring that action is taken if necessary in the light of the outcome of a complaint. The functions of the responsible person will usually be performed by the Director of Public Health.
6. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager is designated the 'Complaints Manager' in accordance with the regulations and is responsible for managing the procedures for handling and considering complaints in accordance with the arrangements made under the Regulations.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

7. Although complainants can refer their complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) from the outset, the LGSCO will not normally investigate until the Council or service provider has conducted its own investigation and provided a response. Where it has not been possible for the complaint to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant they may refer the matter to the LGSCO.

Information and Accessibility

8. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services, including the complaints procedure. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
9. Information is available on the Council's website. There is also an electronic form which people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, by email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
10. The Complaints Manager can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Summary

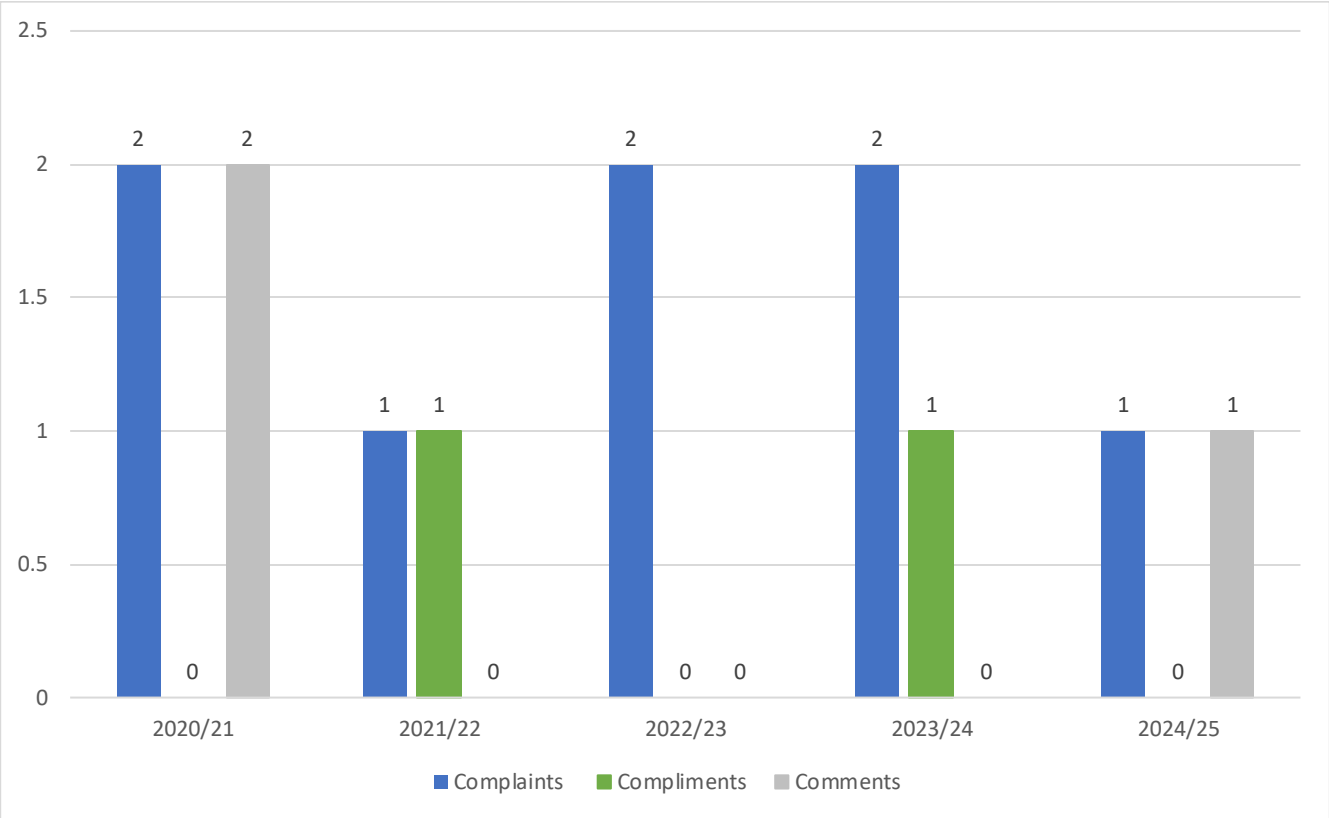
11. The Council received one complaint about Public Health services in 2024/25, a decrease from two in 2023/24.
12. Zero compliments were received about Public Health services in 2024/25, a decrease from one in 2023/24.
13. The Council received one comment about Public Health services during 2024/25, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Review of the Year

Breakdown of all Representations

14. A total of two representations were handled under the procedure during 2024/25.

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments Received



15. The complaint related to a delay in responding to a referral to the smoking cessation service.

16. The comment suggested that in addition to services aimed at prevention of child sexual abuse there should be a greater focus on intervention with those at risk of going on to commit offences.

Complaint Outcomes

17. Two complaints were determined during 2024/25. One was not upheld and the other was partially upheld.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints (LGSCO) Received 2024/25

18. No Public Health complaints were progressed to the LGSCO during 2024/25, as was the case in 2023/24.

Local Government Ombudsman Complaint Outcomes (LGSCO) 2024/25

19. No Public Health complaints were determined by the LGSCO during 2024/25, as was the case in 2023/24.

Organisational Learning

20. As a result of the complaint regarding the smoking cessation service it was agreed going forward that Public Health would contact the GP Practice to remind staff of the information required as part of a referral and also the availability of the option for self-referral. Public Health also attended the GP Practice Managers' meeting to ensure every GP Practice in the borough understands how to refer into the Stop Smoking Service, in an effort to ensure there are no further issues in the future.

Further recommendations

21. There are no further recommendations.

Performance against the Procedure

22. While the Regulations allow a maximum of six months to respond to a complaint, we aim to respond to complaints within 30 working days.
23. While the complaint determined during 2024/25 was not responded to within 30 working days, it was responded to within the time permitted in the Regulations.

Performance Indicator for 2024/25

24. In relation to Public Health complaints the Council's key performance indicator is the number of maladministration decisions received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council received zero maladministration decisions during 2024/25.
25. Full details of those complaints determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

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**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
04 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN AND THE
HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update of the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) since the preparation of the previous report on 5 September 2024.
2. To provide Members with the Annual Review Letter of the LGSCO (**Appendix 1**).

Summary

3. Attached at **Appendix 2** is the Complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman Service report that is due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September 2025. This report sets out in abbreviated form the decisions reached by the LGSCO and the HOS between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 and outlines actions taken as a result.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Members consider and discuss the complaints made to both the LGSCO and the HOS.

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

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**CABINET
9 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN
AND THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE**

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

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with the Annual Review Letter of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) (**Appendix 1**).
2. To provide Members with an update on the outcome of cases which have been determined by the LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) since the preparation of the previous report to Cabinet on 10 September 2024.

Summary

3. The Annual Review Letter of the LGSCO, provides a positive assessment of the Council's performance against their three performance measures.
4. This report sets out in abbreviated form the decisions reached by the LGSCO and the HOS between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 and outlines actions taken as a result. It seeks to identify trends and any further organisational learning to improve services provision.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reason; it is important that Members are aware of the outcome of complaints made to the LGSCO and the HOS in respect of the Councils activities.

**Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director Resources & Governance**

Background Papers

Correspondence with the LGSCO and HOS is treated as confidential to preserve anonymity of complainants.

Lee Downey : Extension 5451

Council Plan	Learning from complaints contributes towards the delivery of the priorities in the Plan.
Addressing inequalities	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to addressing inequality.
Tackling Climate Change	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to tackling climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The revised procedures aim to improve the efficiency with which complaints are handled. The recommendations contained within the appended reports aim to reduce risk and improve efficiency in the way we interact with our customers.
Health and Wellbeing	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to the effective delivery and the improved health and well-being of the population of Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Learning from complaints, compliments and comments contributes to the effective delivery of the Community Safety services.
Wards Affected	All.
Groups Affected	All.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not have a direct impact on the Budget and Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This report does not constitute a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This report does not require an Urgent Decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The purpose of the Children's Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report is, in part, to improve the service we provide to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Background

7. The LGSCO encourages officers to share the annual letter with colleagues and elected Members, as the information can provide valuable insights into service areas, early warning signs of problems and is a key source of information for governance, audit, risk and scrutiny functions.
8. The opportunity is normally taken to analyse the areas of the Council's functions where complaints have arisen. It is appropriate to do that in order to establish whether there is any pattern to complaints received or whether there is a particular Directorate affected or a type of complaint which is prevalent. If there were a significant number of cases in any one particular area, that might indicate a problem which the Council would seek to address.

Information and Analysis

Annual Review Letter of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 9. As detailed in their Annual Review Letter (Appendix 1), the LGSCO made 5.4 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. The average for authorities of this type is 5.3 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.
- 10. The LGSCO were satisfied the Council had successfully implemented 100% of their recommendations.
- 11. The LGSCO also found the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy in more upheld cases (33%) than similar organisations (10%), before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

Outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

- 12. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the LGSCO notified the Council it had determined 17 complaints.
- 13. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the HOS notified the Council it had determined one complaint.
- 14. The LGSCO has updated the decisions they use. As a result, it is not possible to make a direct comparison with previous years. However, the new decisions in ***bold/italics*** in the table below are broadly comparable to those previous decisions in *italics* in the table below.

15. The outcome of cases on which the LGSCO reached a decision is shown in the table below.

LGSCO Findings	No. of cases 2024/25	No. of cases 2023/24	No. of cases 2022/23	No. of cases 2021/22
Closed after initial enquiries: no further action	7	11	9	9
Closed after initial enquiries: out of jurisdiction	4	5	4	1
<i>Not upheld: no fault</i>	0	0	1	N/A
<i>Not upheld: No further action</i>	0	1	N/A	N/A
<i>Not upheld: no maladministration</i>	0	0	1	1
Premature	0	1	N/A	N/A
<i>Upheld: fault and injustice</i>	3	3	4	N/A
<i>Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice</i>	0	0	0	4
Upheld: Maladministration, No Injustice	0	0	0	0
<i>Upheld: fault and injustice – no further action, organisation already remedied</i>	0	2	1	N/A
<i>Upheld: maladministration and injustice - no further action, satisfactory remedy provided by the org</i>	0	0	0	1
<i>Upheld: no further action, organisation already remedied</i>	3	3	1	N/A
<i>Upheld: not investigated - injustice remedied during Body in Jurisdiction's complaint process</i>	0	0	0	0

16. The outcome of cases on which the HOS reached a decision is shown in the table below.

HOS Findings	No. of cases 2024/25	No. of cases 2023/24	No. of cases 2022/23	No. of cases 2021/22
Maladministration	0	2	0	0
No Maladministration	0	0	0	0
Service Failure	1	0	0	2

17. A summary of the findings in relation to those cases which were upheld is provided below.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

Upheld: fault and injustice

18. Mrs X complained the Council failed to properly comply with some of the recommended actions it agreed to complete following the Ombudsman's investigation into her original complaint about Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) requests. The Council was at fault for

its delays and failure to properly complete the agreed actions. It was also at fault for its poor communication with Mrs X. This caused Mrs X and Mr Y injustice. To remedy the injustice caused by the faults identified, the Council apologised; paid Mrs X £150 to acknowledge the further distress and confusion caused; issued Mr Y a new support plan which showed the increased £50 per session for his Day Care DRE; and backdated Mr Y's Day Care DRE to May 2021 and refunded him with the additional one-year outstanding DRE cost.

19. Mr X and his mother, Mrs Y, complained about the Council's failure to provide a personal budget that met his eligible care and support needs. The LGSCO found the Council to be at fault. To remedy the injustice the Council agreed to apologise, pay Mr X and Mrs Y £100 each to recognise their distress and frustration caused; and refund the money paid by Mr X to attend day services back to when he was first charged. The Council also agreed to refund other services users who were similarly affected and make service improvements.
20. Mr X complained the Council lost evidence, delayed and didn't adequately investigate his reports of noise nuisance from a barking dog. The Council had not retained all the documents relating to this case causing frustration and uncertainty. However, the Council had subsequently investigated the complaints and found no evidence of a statutory nuisance. To remedy the injustice caused by the fault identified the Council paid Mr X £400 to recognise the uncertainty and frustration caused and issued a written reminder to all staff of the importance of keeping proper records.

Upheld: no further action, organisation already remedied

21. Mr X complained about the quality of his mother's, Mrs Y's, domiciliary care. He said the Care Provider had failed to provide the care specified in Mrs Y's care plan, including medication errors, and missed meals. Mr X said despite the Council upholding his complaint the issues had continued. The LGSCO decided they would not investigate the complaint as the Council had fully upheld the complaint and agreed to make service improvements. The LGSCO concluded further investigation by the Ombudsman would not lead to a different outcome.
22. Mr B was concerned about a lack of safety procedures in the Lifeline services provided by the Council to meet Adult Social Care needs. Because the Council had not provided a copy of the relevant procedures Mr B did not believe they existed and worried anyone using the Lifeline service is at risk. Mr B wanted the Council to review or create safety procedures for the Lifeline service. The LGSCO decided they would not investigate the complaint as the Council accepted fault and has taken satisfactory action to acknowledge the impact on the complainant and improve future service. The LGSCO concluded there was not enough evidence to suggest a wider problem that would justify investigation.
23. Mr X complained his father Mr Y, has been charged £9,000 for care received having been told by the Council the care would be funded. The LGSCO decided not to investigate Mr X's complaint as the Council has agreed a proportionate way to resolve the complaint.

Housing Ombudsman Services (HOS)

Service Failure

24. The HOS determined that in accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was service failure by the landlord (the Council) in relation to its response to the resident installing CCTV and its complaints handling. To remedy the complaint the Council apologised and paid the resident £200 in recognition of the distress, inconvenience and time and trouble caused. The Council also ensured its staff were fully trained on the guidelines surrounding domestic CCTV and are clear on how residents can apply for permission and in what circumstances it might grant permission; and contacted the resident to check if they had any current concerns about vandalism or security issues.

Analysis

25. The Council's performance, as detailed in the Annual Review Letter of the LGSCO, is comparable to other unitary authorities in terms of upheld decisions, implementation of recommendations and notably better in terms of providing a satisfactory remedy to complainants prior to the LGSCO's involvement.
26. In relation to LGSCO decisions, the Council received three Upheld: Fault and Injustice decisions, the same number as in 2023/24. The Council also received three Upheld: no further action, organisation already remedied decisions, the same number as in 2023/24.
27. In relation to HOS decisions, the Council received zero maladministration decisions, a decrease from two in 2023/24. The Council also received one Service Failure decision, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
28. No trends have been identified that would lead the Council to implement additional measures to those identified by the Ombudsmen, and the organisational learning identified as a result of these complaints should be sufficient to assist in ensuring there is not a re-occurrence.

Outcome of Consultation

29. The issues contained within this report do not require formal consultation.

21 May 2025

By email

Ms Rouse
Chief Executive
Darlington Borough Council

Dear Ms Rouse

Annual Review letter 2024-25

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2025. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. We have listened to your feedback, and I am pleased to be able to share your annual statistics earlier in the year to better fit with local reporting cycles. I hope this proves helpful to you.

[Your annual statistics are available here.](#)

In addition, you can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

In a change to our approach, we will write to organisations in July where there is exceptional practice or where we have concerns about an organisation's complaint handling. Not all organisations will get a letter. If you do receive a letter it will be sent in advance of its publication on our website on 16 July 2025, alongside our annual Review of Local Government Complaints.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

In February we published [good practice guides](#) to support councils to adopt our [Complaint Handling Code](#). The guides were developed in consultation with councils that have been piloting the Code and are based on the real-life, front-line experience of people handling complaints day-to-day, including their experience of reporting to senior leaders and elected members. The guides were issued alongside free [training resources](#) organisations can use to make sure front-line staff understand what to do when someone raises a complaint. We will be applying the Code in our casework from April 2026 and we know a large number of councils have already adopted it into their local policies with positive results.

This year we relaunched our popular [complaint handling training](#) programme. The training is now more interactive than ever, providing delegates with an opportunity to consider a complaint from receipt to resolution. Early feedback has been extremely positive with delegates reporting an increase in confidence in handling complaints after completing the training. To find out more contact training@lgo.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

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**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT & CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING
QUARTER 1 2025/26**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Q1 2025/26 report.

Summary

2. Attached at **Annex 1** is the Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Q1 2025/26 report which is due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September 2025.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members consider and discuss the Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Q1 2025/26 report.

Dave Winstanley
Executive Director - Environment, Highways & Community Services

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director - Resources & Governance

Background Papers

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

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CABINET
09 SEPTEMBER 2025

PROJECT POSITION STATEMENT & CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING
QUARTER 1 2025/26

Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director -
Dave Winstanley, Executive Director – Environment, Highways & Community Services
Elizabeth Davison, Executive Director – Resources & Governance

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides:
 - (a) A summary of the latest Capital resource and commitment position, to inform monitoring of the affordability and funding of the Council's capital programme.
 - (b) An update on the current status of all construction projects currently being undertaken by the Council.
2. It also seeks approval for a number of changes to the programme.

Summary

3. The projected outturn of the current Capital Programme is £354.868m against an approved programme of £354.982m. The investment is delivering a wide range of improvements to the Council's assets and more critically, to Council services. Refurbishment of council homes, improved learning environments in schools, better traffic flows and opportunities for sustainable travel have been achieved and are detailed within the report. The programme, including commitments, remains affordable within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 – 2028/29.
4. The Council has a substantial annual construction programme of work. The current project position statement (PPS) shows there are 19 live projects currently being managed by the Council with an overall projected outturn value of £131.234m. The majority of projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations but are being monitored given the current pressures on resources in the construction sector nationally.
5. The projects are managed either by the Council's in-house management team, a Framework Partner or by Consultants sourced via an open/OJEU tender process.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- (a) Note the attached status position on construction projects.
 - (b) Note projected capital expenditure and resources.
 - (c) Approve the adjustments to resources as detailed in paragraph 21.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) To inform Cabinet of the current status of construction projects.
 - (b) To make Cabinet aware of the latest financial position of the Council.
 - (c) To maintain effective management of resources.

Dave Winstanley
Executive Director - Environment, Highways & Community Services

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director - Resources & Governance

Background Papers

- (i) Capital Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 – 2028/29
- (ii) Project Position Statement and Capital Monitoring Outturn 2024/25

Brian Robson : Extension 6608
Steve Wake : Extension 5424

Council Plan	The Capital Programme referred to in the report supports delivery of the Council plan.
Addressing inequalities	There are no specific implications for Addressing Inequalities.
Tackling Climate Change	Tackling Climate Change issues are assessed and reported in individual projects.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The recommendations support the effective and efficient use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues relating to Health and Wellbeing which the report needs to address.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected.
Groups Affected	The proposals do not affect any particular groups within the community.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	The report does not represent a key decision.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

2025/26 Capital Spend and Resources

8. **Appendix 1** is for information and lists all live construction projects and provides details on numbers, type and details of the key individuals responsible for the delivery of the projects. It also provides a statement on the current status position on each project, details of actions being taken, where required and any current issues.
9. **Appendix 2** summarises the Council's capital commitments which are yet to be financed and also shows how it is intended for them to be financed. The total value of commitments, including available resources brought forward from previous years and 2025-26 schemes previously released by Cabinet, is £132.034m.

10. **Appendix 3** shows the Council's projected capital receipts and how they are going to be utilised to help finance the capital programme over the life of the MTFP.

Project Position Statement

11. Project management procedures require the production by project managers of a Project Position Statement (PPS) for all projects over £75,000. This report brings together the pertinent data from the current PPS with financial information from the Financial Management System (FMS) and approvals by Cabinet.
12. The Project Position Statement (Appendix 1) details the current live construction projects, up to the end of June 2025, by delivery area, and provides details on numbers, type and details of the key individuals responsible for the delivery of the projects. It also provides a statement on the current status position on each project, details of actions being taken, where required and any current issues. The statement excludes any completed projects or those on hold.
13. The overview of live construction projects is as follows:

	Projects	Current Approved Budget £ / p	Projected Outturn £ / p	Variance %	Variance (Value) £ / p
Environment, Highways & Community Services	10	76,975,830	77,728,430	1.0	752,600
Resources & Governance	3	38,485,621	37,691,715	(2.1)	(793,906)
Economy & Public Protection	6	15,813,360	15,813,360	0.0	0
TOTAL	19	131,274,811	131,233,505		(41,306)

14. The table shown above includes a column for current approved budget. In certain cases this budget figure may be different from the original approved budget. This could be as a result of variances identified during construction or other variables not known at the initiation stage. The original budget and all subsequent changes have been reported to and approved by Cabinet.

15. The live projects are at the following stages:

Department	Brief	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	Total
Environment, Highways & Community Services	0	0	0	4	2	4	10
Resources & Governance	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Economy & Public Protection	0	0	1	5	0	0	6
TOTAL	0	0	1	12	2	4	19

Control Point 1 (CP1) – Start Up: is used to define the position of a project at its conception stage.

- (a) **Control Point 2 (CP2) – Initiate:** defines a project at feasibility stage and will likely include a desktop assessment of a project and the use of informed estimates.
- (b) **Control Point 3 (CP3) – Define:** the point that the project is progressed to RIBA Stage F, i.e. detailed design.
- (c) **Control Point 4 (CP4) – Construction Phase:** is the stage at which work begins on the project, i.e. for a construction project on site through to build completion.
- (d) **Control Point 5 (CP5) – Evaluate:** is the stage post completion of the project at which time the project is reviewed and lessons learned are discussed in order that they can be taken to the next or similar projects.

16. The status on live projects is as follows:

Department	Red	Blue	Green
Environment, Highways & Community Services	2	8	0
Resources & Governance	0	1	2
Economy & Public Protection	0	6	0
TOTAL	2	15	2

- (a) Colours (Green better Red worse than) are used to identify projects that have variances which are:
 - (i) More than £5,000, if the variance is also more than 5% of the approved budget for the project, or
 - (ii) More than £50,000 regardless of the percentage variance
- (b) Projects that are within these margins are symbolised with the colour Blue.

- (c) In addition to cost, the same colours are used to indicate similar levels of variances in time and quality/outputs/outcomes.

17. Current projects with the Red colour are as follows:

Project	Reason for Variance	Action
Skinnergate Re-development Housing	A number of delays have occurred on this project including the need to produce a revised design to satisfy concerns raised by English Heritage at the planning application stage and the requirements for Nutrient Neutrality.	Phase 1 demolition is now complete, remaining demolition works have now commenced.
Hopetown Darlington	<p>Over the past twelve months, a range of outcomes regarding financial outturn have been presented, primarily due to remaining construction risks and disputes. These outcomes were expressed as a range, from a £605k under budget position to a £363k over budget position.</p> <p>With the project now substantially complete and final accounts submitted there is more clarity on the risk and additional costs.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the financial year 24/25, the project is presently £569k over budget after the final account had been submitted.</p> <p>However, this figure includes several items subject to dispute.</p> <p>Should the Council be successful in claims against the relevant parties, then project's budget deficit will be reduced to £124k. Conversely, if all aspects prove unsuccessful, the upper limit of the forecast projection will result in a budget deficit of £792,000. We will continue to report the high-end number in the PPS which represents an</p>	We are seeking legal advice on the areas of dispute.

	overspend of 2%.	
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Reconciliation of Project Position Statement to Capital Programme

18. The table shown below reconciles the differences between the Capital Programme (CP) and the Project Position Statement (PPS). Differences occur because the Project Position Statement includes all construction projects over £75,000 in value funded from Capital and Revenue sources. Spending within the Capital Programme is not always of a construction nature, can be of any value and excludes Revenue funded schemes.

	Value £m
Live Projects from Project Position	131.234
Schemes closed or on hold within CP but awaiting PPS post project review.	13.411
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Housing Repairs & Maintenance	35.176
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Highways Maintenance	15.139
Annualised Schemes excluded from PPS - Childrens Services School Maintenance	0.509
Non construction excluded from PPS	14.092
Capital Investment fund excluded from PPS	100.283
Projects under 75k excluded from PPS	1.830
Capital Schemes not yet integrated into PPS reporting	21.281
Included in PPS & CMR	0.000
Funding not yet allocated	21.913
Capital Programme	354.868

19. The table below shows the split of the approved capital programme of £354.982m, between the different service areas and also the various categories of spend. When compared to the table above it shows that there is a projected £0.114m underspend on the approved capital programme, however, it should be noted that most of this amount is made up of grant funding or borrowing.

	Construction				Non construction	Capital investment fund	Housing New Build - not yet allocated	Total
	Live Schemes 75k & Over	Annualised Schemes	Completed Schemes awaiting review	Live Schemes under 75k				
Area	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Housing	43.551	35.079	0.000	0.033	2.069	0.000	16.925	97.657
Economic Growth	33.057	0.099	0.440	0.350	8.284	77.833	3.476	123.539
Highways/Transport	50.372	15.013	9.800	0.883	2.003	17.978	1.512	97.561
Leisure & Culture	22.025	0.125	2.545	0.310	0.000	3.974	0.000	28.979
Education	3.768	0.509	0.000	0.177	0.079	1.061	0.000	5.594
Adult Social Care	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.071	0.000	0.000	0.071
Other	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.581	0.000	0.000	1.581
Total	152.773	50.825	12.785	1.753	14.087	100.846	21.913	354.982

Capital Programme

20. Paragraph 21 shows the movements in the Capital Programme since the approval of the 2025/26 Capital MTFP, some of which have not yet been approved by Members.

21. Adjustment to resources requested by departments:

Adjustments needing approval release

Department	Scheme	Value £	Reason for adjustment	Resource type adjusted
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Bridge Maintenance	£145,810	Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) 24/25 Contribution from Bridge Maintenance	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Dolphin Centre M&E Phase 3	£50,000	RCCO 24/25 Contribution towards Dolphin Centre Design Fees for Invest to Save - M&E Phase 3	RCCO
Environment, Highways & Community Services	Whessoe Road 25/26	£130,000	RCCO 20/21 Contribution to fund street lighting cabling work	RCCO
TOTAL		£325,810		

Outcome of Consultation

22. There has been no consultation in the preparation of this report.

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2025/26 Capital Resources Summary

Row Ref.		Approved Commitments £M	Virement of Resources £M	Variance £M	Total £M
1	Capital Commitments				
2	Brought forward from 2024/25	95.525			
3	2025/26 Capital Programme (released by Cabinet)	36.509			132.034
4	Projected (Under)/Over Spend				
5	Total Commitments	132.034	0.000	0.000	132.034
	To Be Funded By:				
	External and Departmental Resources				
6	External Funding and Departmental Supported Borrowing	19.702	-	-	19.702
7	Departmental Unsupported Borrowing	0.000	-	-	0.000
8	Capital Grants	51.480	-	-	51.480
9	Capital Contributions	0.000	-	-	0.000
10	Revenue Contributions	19.013	-	-	19.013
11	Capital Receipts - HRA	0.300	-	-	0.300
	Total	90.495	0.000	0.000	90.495
	Corporate Resources				
12	Capital Receipts (General Fund)/ Prudential Borrowing	41.539	-	-	41.539
	Total	41.539	0.000	0.000	41.539
13	Total Resources	132.034	0.000	0.000	132.034

Corporate Resources Analysis

		£M
14	Required Resources to fund 2025/26 expenditure (see above)	41.539
15	Total Planned Use of Corporate Resources	41.539
16	Less: Total Projected net Capital Receipts 25/26 (as per Appendix 3)	(6.436)
17	Add: projects already released and included in the capital commitments above	5.955
18	Corporate Resources required to fund capital programme	41.058

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Capital Receipts Utilisation - latest projection

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	£m	£m	£m
Projected Opening Balance as at 1 April	2.681	0.481	4.225
Projected net Capital Receipts	3.755	4.444	4.262
Total projected Capital Receipts	6.436	4.925	8.487
<u>Less (as per approved capital programme)</u>			
Capitalisation utilisation as per MTFP	(1.400)	0.000	0.000
Council funded schemes	(0.400)	(0.250)	(0.250)
Economic Growth Investment Fund	(0.500)	0.000	0.000
Earmarked receipts	(0.182)	0.000	0.000
Slippage from previous years	(3.473)	(0.450)	0.000
Projected available Capital Receipts as at 31 March	0.481	4.225	8.237

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**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 SEPTEMBER 2025**

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/26 – QUARTER 1

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an early forecast of the 2025/26 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.

Summary

2. Attached at **Annex 1** is the revenue budget monitoring 2025/26 quarter one is due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September 2025.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members consider and discuss the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2025/26 – Quarter 1

**Brett Nielsen
Assistant Director Resources**

Background Papers

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

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**CABINET
9 SEPTEMBER 2025**

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/26 – QUARTER 1

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

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an early forecast of the 2025/26 revenue budget outturn as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.

Summary

2. This is the first revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2025/26. The latest projections show an overall decline of £2.166m on the 2025-29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This is due to £3.489m of departmental pressures, a decline in corporate resources of £0.166m, offset by £1.489m of additional balances following the 2024/25 final outturn.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) The forecast revenue outturn for 2025/26 be noted.
 - (b) Further regular reports be made to monitor progress and take prompt action if necessary

Reasons

4. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) To continue effective management of resources.
 - (b) To continue to deliver services to agreed levels.

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

Background Papers

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

Brett Nielsen : Extension 5403

Council Plan	The Council's revenue budget contributes to all priorities outlined within the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	This report is providing an update on the revenue budget position therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
Tackling Climate Change	This report provides an update on the revenue budget position, which supports the council's responsibilities and ambitions to tackle climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report contains updated information regarding efficiency savings contained within the MTFP.
Health and Wellbeing	This report is providing an update on the revenue budget position therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Wards Affected	No specific impact on an individual area as a result of this report
Groups Affected	No specific impact on an individual area as a result of this report
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

- This is the first revenue budget management report to Cabinet for 2025/26 and provides an early forecast of the latest revenue position as part of the Council's continuous financial management process.
- The information in this report has been taken from the financial records to June and managers' projections for the remainder of the year. Assumptions have been made

concerning future demand for services over the year, therefore changes in the projected outturn are inevitable as the Council is a large and complex organisation.

7. Overall, the projected General Fund reserves position as at the 31 March 2026 is £6.223m, which is £2.166m less than the planned balances in the 2025-29 MTFP. This change relates to £3.489m of departmental pressures, a decline in corporate resources of £0.166m, offset by £1.489m of additional balances following the 2024/25 outturn.

Departmental Resources

8. Departmental resource projections are summarised in **Appendix 2** and detailed in **Appendices 2(a) to 2(e)**.
9. **People Group** budgets are projected to be overspent by £3.825m at the end of the financial year. The main changes are detailed below:
 - (a) **Children's Services** are projecting an overspend of £3.895m at the year end, the main changes from the MTFP are;
 - (i) The Adoption and Placements budget is projected to be overspent of £3.677m.
 - a) There are five new residential placements, with projected costs of £2.135m. Additional costs are projected for two existing placements where the needs have increased substantially from budget setting, with increased costs of £1.389m. There has been an independent home closure and two children who were placed there have therefore moved with increased expenditure of £0.437m and remand costs of £0.080m. These pressures have been offset in part by additional Home Office grant income of £0.111m.
 - b) Independent Foster placements (IFA's) are projected to be underspent by £0.261m as four placements have ceased. Further placements in IFA's have not been secured because there is no suitable capacity in the market, therefore requiring the use of more costly residential placements (as above) to meet the statutory care needs of the children.
 - (ii) The children's staffing divisions are projected to be overspent by £0.218m, this is a combination of additional staffing and agency costs to cover demand in children caseloads.
 - (b) **Adult Social Care & Health** is projected to be underspent by £0.018m, the main changes from the MTFP are:
 - (i) External Packages of Care budgets are projected to underspend by £0.069m. There have been additional placements within residential and domiciliary care, however these have been offset by additional grant income.
 - (ii) Long Term Conditions are projected to be £0.040m over budget due to additional costs at the short break stay facility and additional staffing costs.

11. **Environment, Highways and Community Services** budgets are projecting an underspend of £0.389m, the main changes are detailed below:

- (a) **Highways & Capital Projects** is projected to be underspent by £0.172m. Following agreement between TVCA and the bus operators on the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) scheme for 2025/26. Concessionary Fares should underspend by £0.142m as the final agreed cost to Darlington is slightly better than the estimates used when setting the MTFP. An ongoing budgeted underspend for electricity in Car Parking R&M is expected to see the service underspend by £0.030m.
- (b) **Community Services** is expected to be underspent by £0.250m. Waste Management tonnages over the first quarter have not risen as greatly as estimated compared to the levels used when setting the MTFP. Overall disposal costs are expected to be underspent by £0.250m. Tonnages will be monitored over the year and projections updated as appropriate.
- (c) **Community Safety** overall is expected to be underspent by £0.250m. Car Parking and Enforcement is expected to be over target income by £0.250m as patronage at the Council's car parks has remained positive and continues to perform better than levels projected as part of the MTFP.
- (d) **Leisure and Cultural Services** is expected to overspend by £0.220m. Work on the business plan at Hopetown Darlington continues at pace to drive income and efficiencies at the museum. One area that has been identified as a pressure is income generation associated to Skerne Bridge car park which is expected to have a shortfall of £0.220m due to low patronage as visitors to the site use alternative parking or transport solutions.
- (e) **Corporate Landlord** is expected to overspend by £0.076m due to pressures associated with utilities. Delays outside the control of the Council associated with the replacement of the CHP unit at the Dolphin Centre is the main driver for the overspend. The unit is installed but awaiting inspection by an external body which is expected shortly.

12. **Resources and Governance** budgets are projecting a year end budget overspend of £0.053m, the changes from MTFP are detailed below:

- (a) **Law & Governance** is projecting an overspend of £0.061m. The main areas of variance are,
 - (i) The Coroners service is projecting an overspend of £0.048m due to the increased costs of running the service, resulting in a higher recharge from Durham County.
 - (ii) Legal Services division is reporting an overspend of £0.059m, from additional agency costs to support the demand of Children's legal cases, (including backfill

of vacant posts) offset in part by a projected underspend in the costs of independent legal services for children's legal cases.

- (iii) The overspends have been offset in part by running cost and staff turnover savings across the division.

13. The **Economy and Public Protection** budgets are projected to break even.

14. The School balances and allocations are shown in **Appendix 2(f)**.

Council Wide and Corporately Managed Resources

15. The Council Wide budget is projected to be £0.166m overspent at the year end from the pay offer of 3.2%. At the time of writing the pay offer has been accepted for the National Joint Council employees and Chief Officers, though some of agreements remain outstanding. The MTFP included an estimated pay award of 3% the projected overspend therefore is due to the additional 0.2%. All other Corporate Resources are forecast to be on target at this stage of the year.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

16. HRA projections are shown in **Appendix 3** with an overall projected balanced budget. There has been a reduction in the estimated working balance of £0.116m, which is primarily due to:

- (i) Dwelling rental income is forecast £0.154m lower, due to 31 right to buys since the budget was set and voids.
- (ii) Sundry rents are forecast to be £0.037m better due to an increase in income from garages and shops and income from charges for facilities is forecast £0.089m better from an increase in flats, communal areas and lifeline.
- (iii) Operational Costs are forecast £0.103m higher than planned, due to increases in staffing costs following a restructure and an increase in subscription costs.

Conclusion

17. The Council's projected revenue reserves at the end of 2025/26 are £6.223m, £2.166m lower than the initial 2025-29 MTFP position. This position relates to £3.489m of departmental pressures, a decline in corporate resources of £0.166m, offset by £1.489m of additional balances following the 2024/25 outturn.

18. The Council is facing significant pressures from increases in the complexity of need and the lack of suitable provision for children in our care. This is not only impacting on Darlington but is a national issue that has been a pressure for all Councils with social care responsibilities in recent years. In Darlington we have invested in our own provision through placement sufficiency which has provided positive outcomes to date, but this

takes time to build capacity. We continue to develop options to further our provision to provide solutions to all needs.

19. As a Council we continue to lobby the Government to highlight the pressures that Councils face to deliver statutory services, particularly the issues with supporting the needs of our Children.
20. The Government is consulting on funding reform with a revised financial settlement due towards the end of the year. There is an acknowledgement that areas with deprivation are not being funded correctly and that significant budget cuts through the austerity years were unsustainable for many Local Authorities in areas including the North East. It is anticipated that Darlington will benefit from these reforms although at present it is not clear the extent of this.
21. All services continue to scrutinise their budgets to reduce expenditure or generate additional income to assist with the in-year budget position and provide savings for inclusion in the next MTFP.

Outcome of Consultation

22. No external consultation has been carried out in preparing this report.

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2025/26**Projected General Fund Reserve at 31st March 2026**

	2025-29 MTFP (Feb 2025)
Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) :-	£000
MTFP Planned Opening Balance 01/04/2025	11,458
Approved net contribution from balances	(3,069)
Planned Closing Balance 31/03/2026	8,389
Increase in opening balance from 2024-25 results	1,489
Projected corporate underspends / (overspends) :-	
Council Wide - Pay Award Pressure	(166)
Financing Costs	0
Joint Venture - Investment Return	0
Contingencies Budget	0
 Projected General Fund Reserve (excluding Departmental) 31st March 2026	 at 9,712
 Planned Balance at 31st March 2026	 8,389
Improvement	1,323

Departmental projected year-end balances

	Improvement / (decline) compared with 2025-29 MTFP
	£000
People Group	(3,825)
Environment, Highways & Community Services Group	389
Resources and Governance Group	(53)
Chief Executive & Economy	0
 TOTAL	 (3,489)

Summary Comparison with :-

	2025-29 MTFP
	£000
Corporate Resources - increase in opening balance from 24/25 results	1,489
Corporate Resources - additional in-year Improvement/(Decline)	(166)
Quarter 1 Budget Rebase	0
Departmental - Improvement / (Decline)	(3,489)
 Improvement / (Decline) compared with MTFP	 (2,166)
 Projected General Fund Reserve at 31st March 2026	 6,223

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GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2025/26

	Budget			Expenditure	
	Original 2025/26	Approved Adjustments	Amended Approved Budget	Projected Outturn	Variance
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Departmental Resources					
People Services	90,541	339	90,880	94,705	3,825
Environment, Highways & Community Services	26,170	233	26,403	26,014	(389)
Resources and Governance	15,568	177	15,745	15,798	53
Chief Executive	329	5	334	334	0
Economy & Public Protection	1,832	125	1,957	1,957	0
Total Departmental Resources	134,440	879	135,319	138,808	3,489
Corporate Resources					
Council Wide - Pay Award Pressure	663	(879)	(216)	(50)	166
Financing Costs	4,028	0	4,028	4,028	0
Joint Venture - Investment Return	(1,977)	0	(1,977)	(1,977)	0
Contingencies Budget					
Apprentice Levy	272	0	272	272	0
Total Corporate Resources	2,986	(879)	2,107	2,273	166
Net Expenditure	137,426	0	137,426	141,081	3,655
Contributions To / (From) Reserves					
Planned Contribution to General Fund Reserves (MTFP)	(2,639)	0	(2,639)	(2,639)	0
General Fund Total	134,787	0	134,787	138,442	3,655

Note: Appendix 1 shows an increase in reserves of £1.489m brought forward from 2024/25

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REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2025/26

	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to June £000	Projected Spend £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Council Wide</u>							
Procurement savings	(50)	0	(50)	0	(50)	(50)	0
Pay Award	713	(879)	(166)	0	0	0	166
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	663	(879)	(216)	0	(50)	(50)	166

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REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2025/26							
	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to June £000	Projected Spend £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>People Group</u>							
Director and Departmental	193	2	195	14	181	195	0
<u>Adults & Children Services</u>							
Performance & Transformation	810	10	820	138	682	820	0
Business Support	1,745	22	1,767	296	1,471	1,767	0
	2,555	32	2,587	434	2,153	2,587	0
<u>Children's Services</u>							
Children's Services Management & Other Services	672	7	679	134	595	729	50
Assessment & Care Planning	4,577	(125)	4,452	552	4,098	4,650	198
First Response & Early Help	4,036	216	4,252	494	3,728	4,222	(30)
Youth Offending	320	0	320	(14)	334	320	0
Adoption & Placements	21,927	44	21,971	4,714	20,934	25,648	3,677
Disabled Children	1,632	11	1,643	278	1,365	1,643	0
Quality Assurance & Practice Improvement	138	3	141	(133)	274	141	0
	33,302	156	33,458	6,025	31,328	37,353	3,895
<u>Development & Commissioning</u>							
Commissioning	2,081	17	2,098	715	1,374	2,089	(9)
Voluntary Sector	292	0	292	18	274	292	0
	2,373	17	2,390	733	1,648	2,381	(9)
<u>Education</u>							
Education	868	16	884	2,974	(2,133)	841	(43)
Schools	0	0	0	1,858	(1,858)	0	0
Transport Unit	3,362	13	3,375	1,228	2,147	3,375	0
	4,230	29	4,259	6,060	(1,844)	4,216	(43)
<u>Public Health</u>							
Public Health	0	0	0	2,194	(2,194)	0	0
	0	0	0	2,194	(2,194)	0	0
<u>Adult Social Care & Health</u>							
External Purchase of Care	39,948	0	39,948	1,969	37,910	39,879	(69)
Intake & Enablement	735	27	762	667	95	762	0
Older People Long Term Condition	2,090	27	2,117	738	1,387	2,125	8
Physical Disability Long Term Condition	6	0	6	0	6	6	0
Learning Disability Long Term Condition	2,331	30	2,361	591	1,810	2,401	40
Mental Health Long Term Condition	1,228	24	1,252	412	848	1,260	8
Service Development & Integration	977	(11)	966	(103)	1,064	961	(5)
Workforce Development	573	6	579	104	475	579	0
	47,888	103	47,991	4,378	43,595	47,973	(18)
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	90,541	339	90,880	19,838	74,867	94,705	3,825

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REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2025/26

	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original	Approved	Amended	Expenditure	Projected	Total	
	Budget	Adjustments	Budget	to June	Spend	Projection	
<u>Environment, Highways & Community Services</u>	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Executive Director - Environment, Highways & Community Services	189	2	191	45	146	191	0
<u>Highways & Capital Projects</u>							
AD - Highways & Capital Projects	115	2	117	34	83	117	0
Building Design Services	-21	7	(14)	8	(22)	(14)	0
Capital Projects	394	8	402	121	281	402	0
Car Parking R&M	613	0	613	516	67	583	(30)
Concessionary Fares	2711	0	2,711	10	2,559	2,569	(142)
Flood & Water Act	90	0	90	(189)	279	90	0
Highways	4114	56	4,170	(718)	4,888	4,170	0
Highways - DLO	-344	0	(344)	2,633	(2,977)	(344)	0
Investment & Funding	97	1	98	30	68	98	0
Sustainable Transport	99	0	99	(326)	425	99	0
	7,868	74	7,942	2,119	5,651	7,770	(172)
<u>Community Services</u>							
AD - Environmental Services &							
Community Safety	155	18	173	49	124	173	0
Allotments	21	0	21	(3)	24	21	0
Building Cleaning - DLO	29	8	37	205	(168)	37	0
Cemeteries & Crematorium	(716)	5	(711)	(158)	(553)	(711)	0
Street Scene	7,074	50	7,124	527	6,597	7,124	0
Transport Unit - Fleet Management	0	6	6	270	(264)	6	0
Transport Unit - Fleet Management							
MOT & Private	(15)	1	(14)	29	(43)	(14)	0
Waste Management	4,492	0	4,492	820	3,422	4,242	(250)
Winter Maintenance	642	3	645	166	479	645	0
	11,682	91	11,773	1,905	9,618	11,523	(250)
<u>Community Safety</u>							
CCTV	309	7	316	(294)	610	316	0
Community Safety	843	(97)	746	(83)	829	746	0
Parking	(2,459)	35	(2,424)	(573)	(2,091)	(2,664)	(240)
Parking Enforcement	20	(3)	17	(65)	72	7	(10)
	(1,287)	(58)	(1,345)	(1,015)	(580)	(1,595)	(250)
<u>Leisure and Culture</u>							
Dolphin Centre	1,052	29	1,081	224	857	1,081	0

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2025/26

	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to June £000	Projected Spend £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Environment, Highways & Community Services</u>							
Eastbourne Complex	33	42	75	97	(22)	75	0
Hippodrome	158	22	180	(998)	1,178	180	0
Hopetown Darlington	470	31	501	351	370	721	220
Indoor Bowling Centre	20	0	20	4	16	20	0
Libraries	1,056	9	1,065	291	774	1,065	0
Move More	39	(39)	0	(241)	241	0	0
Outdoor Events	471	3	474	(23)	497	474	0
Community Catering - DLO	0	0	0	15	(15)	0	0
Culture and Heritage Fund	125	1	126	10	116	126	0
	3,424	98	3,522	(270)	4,012	3,742	220
<u>Building Services</u>							
Construction & Minor Works - DLO	(361)	15	(346)	(5,897)	5,551	(346)	0
	(361)	15	(346)	(5,897)	5,551	(346)	0
<u>Corporate Landlord</u>							
Corporate Landlord	4,445	11	4,456	717	3,815	4,532	76
<u>General Support Services</u>							
Works Property & Other	78	0	78	0	68	68	(10)
<u>Joint Levies & Boards</u>							
Environment Agency Levy	132	0	132	129	0	129	(3)
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	26,170	233	26,403	(2,267)	28,281	26,014	(389)

REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2025/26

	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to June £000	Projected Spend £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Resources and Governance</u>							
Group Director of Operations	140	2	142	18	124	142	0
<u>Resources</u>							
AD Resources	127	2	129	21	108	129	0
Financial Services	1,608	16	1,624	215	1,380	1,595	(29)
Financial Assessments & Protection	320	5	325	75	260	335	10
Xentrall (D&S Partnership)	2,107	37	2,144	11	2,133	2,144	0
Human Resources	711	12	723	121	602	723	0
Health & Safety	205	3	208	53	155	208	0
	5,078	75	5,153	496	4,638	5,134	(19)
<u>Head of Strategy Performance & Communications</u>							
Communications & Engagement	1,055	12	1,067	223	844	1,067	0
Systems	1,226	9	1,235	594	641	1,235	0
	2,281	21	2,302	817	1,485	2,302	0
<u>Law & Governance</u>							
AD Law & Governance	140	2	142	17	98	115	(27)
Complaints & FOI	344	3	347	(19)	343	324	(23)
Democratic Services	1,581	12	1,593	184	1,383	1,567	(26)
Registrars	(39)	6	(33)	(107)	74	(33)	0
Administration	439	6	445	68	377	445	0
Legal Services	1,899	13	1,912	231	1,740	1,971	59
Procurement	253	4	257	43	244	287	30
Coroners	334	0	334	0	382	382	48
	4,951	46	4,997	417	4,641	5,058	61
<u>Xentrall Shared Services</u>							
ICT	812	0	812	(109)	921	812	0
	812	0	812	(109)	921	812	0
<u>Building Services</u>							
Maintenance - DLO	(718)	0	(718)	2,822	(3,540)	(718)	0
	(718)	0	(718)	2,822	(3,540)	(718)	0
<u>Housing & Revenues</u>							
Local Taxation	506	11	517	294	269	563	46
Rent Rebates / Rent Allowances / Council Tax	1,061	0	1,061	3,197	(2,134)	1,063	2
Housing Benefits Administration	716	12	728	240	471	711	(17)
Customer Services	256	5	261	83	146	229	(32)
Homelessness	329	5	334	(1,408)	1,754	346	12
Service, Strategy & Regulation and General	156	0	156	(403)	559	156	0
	3,024	33	3,057	2,003	1,065	3,068	11
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	15,568	177	15,745	6,464	9,334	15,798	53

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REVENUE BUDGET MANAGEMENT UPDATE 2025/26

	Budget			Expenditure			(Under)/ Over Spend £000
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Expenditure to June £000	Projected Spend £000	Total Projection £000	
<u>Chief Executive & Economy</u>							
<u>Chief Executive</u>							
Chief Executive	222	3	225	38	187	225	0
Darlington Partnership	107	2	109	(282)	391	109	0
	329	5	334	(244)	578	334	0
<u>Economy and Public Protection</u>							
Executive Director Economy & Public Protection	194	2	196	66	130	196	0
Emergency Planning	97	0	97	0	97	97	0
Building Control	170	4	174	10	164	174	0
Development Management	65	8	73	(73)	146	73	0
Economy	314	3	317	49	268	317	0
Environmental Health	374	6	380	78	302	380	0
Planning Policy, Economic Strategy & Environment	595	8	603	(320)	923	603	0
Property Management and Estates	(377)	6	(371)	(496)	125	(371)	0
Head of Public Protection	0	78	78	0	78	78	0
Private Sector Housing	125	3	128	(18)	146	128	0
General Licensing	0	2	2	15	(13)	2	0
Taxi Licensing	0	2	2	2	0	2	0
Trading Standards	275	3	278	45	233	278	0
	1,832	125	1,957	(642)	2,599	1,957	0
In Year Over/(Under) Spend	2,161	130	2,291	(886)	3,177	2,291	0

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BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2025/26

SCHOOLS PROJECTED BALANCES 2025/26					
School Name	Opening Balance at 1st April 2025	Formula Budget Allocation*	Total Available	Closing Balance at 31st March 2026	Projected Closing Balance as proportion of Formula Budget Allocation
Primary	£000	£000	£000	£000	%
Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools	134	1,275	1,409	96	8%
Harrowgate Hill Primary	(39)	2,548	2,509	(193)	(8%)
Red Hall Primary	156	1,577	1,733	68	4%
Rise Carr College, Clifton House & Eldon House	244	2,268	2,512	192	8%
Primary Total	495	7,668	8,163	163	

*Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools/Rise Carr College original budget. Actual allocation based on attendance.

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HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2025/26

	Budget				
	Original Budget £000	Approved Adjustments £000	Amended Approved Budget £000	Total Projection £000	(Under)/ Over Spend £000
<u>Housing Revenue Account</u>					
<u>Income</u>					
Rents Of Dwellings (Gross)	(24,180)	0	(24,180)	(24,026)	154
Sundry Rents (Including Garages & Shops)	(513)	0	(513)	(550)	(37)
Charges For Services & Facilities	(3,593)	0	(3,593)	(3,682)	(89)
Contribution towards expenditure	(1,527)	0	(1,527)	(1,561)	(34)
Interest Receivable	(374)	0	(374)	(374)	0
Total Income	(30,187)	0	(30,187)	(30,193)	(6)
<u>Expenditure</u>					
Operational	6,390	43	6,433	6,536	103
Service Charges	3,593	19	3,612	3,631	19
Maintenance	6,693	0	6,693	6,693	0
Capital Financing Costs	4,430	0	4,430	4,430	0
Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay	15,947	0	15,947	15,947	0
Increase in Bad Debt Provision	263	0	263	263	0
In year contribution to/(from) balances	(7,129)	(62)	(7,191)	(7,307)	(116)
Total Expenditure	30,187	0	30,187	30,193	6
(Surplus)/Deficit	0	0	0	0	0

HRA Balances	£000
Opening balance 01/04/2025	23,346
Contribution to/(from) balances	(7,307)
Closing balance	16,039

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**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 SEPTEMBER 2025**

INVESTMENT FUND - UPDATE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund.

Summary

2. Attached at **Annex 1** is a report of the Executive Director of Resources and Governance which is being considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 September 2025 in relation to progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members consider the attached report and forward any views to Cabinet for consideration.

**Brett Nielsen
Assistant Director Resources**

Background Papers

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

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**CABINET
9 SEPTEMBER 2025**

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INVESTMENT FUND

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

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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Cabinet on progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund.

Summary

2. In November 2016 the Council established an Investment Fund to be used for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy in order to achieve greater returns given the low returns on investment.
3. The fund provision of £50m is being utilised as envisaged in the original reports to Council to include Joint Venture (JV) vehicles and economic regeneration initiatives. Returns on JV's are anticipated to be over £8.4m and three of the JV schemes have completed with the investment fully repaid and recycled back into the fund.
4. The Investment Fund is currently funding 11 schemes as detailed in the report.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet note the use of the Investment Fund and the returns achieved through the Joint Venture vehicles.

Reasons

6. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) To keep Cabinet informed of progress made on opportunities undertaken and investment returns.
 - (b) To increase development opportunities and income for the Council.

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

Background Papers

- (i) Council report – 24 November 2016 – Investment opportunities
- (ii) Council report – 29 November 2018 – Investment opportunities update and request to increase the fund.

Brett Nielsen : Extension 5403

Council Plan	<p>The use of the Investment Fund contributes to economic development, regeneration and activity therefore contributing to the Council Plan priority.</p> <p>ECONOMY - building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.</p>
Addressing inequalities	This report is providing an update on the financing of schemes therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
Tackling Climate Change	This report is providing an update on the financing of schemes therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The utilisation of the Investment Fund is likely to increase Council income in this and future years.
Health and Wellbeing	This report is providing an update on the financing of schemes therefore there is no impact as a result of this report.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Wards Affected	No anticipated impact on an individual area as a result of this report
Groups Affected	No anticipated impact on specific groups as a result of this report
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Background

7. In November 2016 Council agreed to the establishment of an Investment Fund and following the successful implementation agreed to increase the fund to £50m on 29 November 2018.
8. It has been agreed the fund is recyclable, so as the life of an investment comes to an end and repayment is made, it will be recycled back into the Investment Fund for further utilisation. Any future scheme would still require a full detailed business case report to Cabinet for approval.
9. The Economic Growth and Finance Teams continue to look for new opportunities to provide development and financial returns to the Council using the Investment Fund.
10. Since the establishment of the fund, Cabinet have agreed to 17 uses (19 separate requests), 6 of which have completed with the investment recycled back into the fund. There are 11 remaining schemes as summarised below:

Investment	Cabinet Agreement Date	Agreed Amount £m's	Repaid	Balance £m's
Markets (MAMDL Ltd)	04/02/25	1.80	0	1.80
Neasham Road – Relocation of Cattle Mart	06/03/18	3.14	0.64	2.50
JV - West Park	03/04/18	12.00	12.00	0.00
JV - ESH/DBC North East	03/12/19	9.50	0	9.50
Land Acquisition – Faverdale	03/03/20	1.30	0	1.30
JV - Neasham Road – Elder Brook Park	15/09/20	8.50	8.50	0.00
Faverdale/Burtree Lane Garden Village	05/10/21 16/07/24 03/03/25	P3	P3	P3
Feethams House	11/01/22	1.71	1.67	0.05
JV – Neasham Road – Hurworth Gardens	03/07/23	6.70	0.50	6.20
JV – Blackwell Grange	09/01/24	8.48	0	8.48
Land at Coniscliffe Road	03/03/25	P3	P3	P3
TOTAL		59.12	23.31	35.81

Note: Those with P3 are Part 3 Cabinet reports.

11. The eight JV schemes approved to date are projected to provide a pre-tax return on investment of over £8.4m once all houses have been completed and sold. Receipts from the three schemes that have already completed have provided post tax dividends of £1.608m.

Investment update

12. The following paragraphs provide an update on the individual schemes committed against the Investment Fund since the last report to Cabinet in September 2024.

Market Asset Management

13. In 2017 the Council entered into a lease with Market Asset Management Ltd (MAM) for the management and refurbishment of the Victorian Indoor Market and the management and improvement of Darlington's outdoor market.
14. Following the completion of phase 3 of works to improve the market hall, discussions were held between MAM and the Council regarding the terms of the loan. A restructuring of the loan was agreed by Cabinet in February 2025, with payments commencing in the 2025/26 financial year.

Neasham Road: Linked to Relocation of Cattle Mart

15. In March 2018 Cabinet agreed to purchase the land at Neasham Road from the Darlington Farmers Auction Mart and others to help facilitate the move out of the town centre. The acquisition of the land at Neasham Road not only assisted with this priority but enables the Council to bring forward a significant additional development of new houses for sale and social housing to meet an identified need within the borough.
16. £3.14m was allocated from the investment fund being the balance of funding required for the move. The funding will be repaid from Section 106 receipts from affordable housing along with any capital receipts received from the Cattle Mart and Neasham Road sites. To date £0.64m has been repaid. This scheme is progressing with the construction underway at Elder Brook Park and Hurworth Gardens sites. (see below).

JV West Park

17. The Council entered a JV company with our framework partners to build and sell houses at West Park and agreed funding of £12m to facilitate this, to date £6.42m of funding has been drawn down against this allocation and all of this has been repaid. As this scheme is now in the later phases it is not expected that any further draw down of funding will be required and therefore the balance outstanding on the Investment Fund is shown as fully repaid.
18. The current projection is that this scheme will provide a higher return than the originally anticipated pre-tax profit of £2.1m, once the scheme is completed. To date £2.0m of post-tax dividend has been received.
19. The site continues to see high levels of interest and at the time of writing 21 of the 23 properties available for sale in 2025 have been sold or reserved.

JV Esh/DBC North East

20. Cabinet approved the establishment of a JV company in December 2019 to provide the infrastructure, build and sell homes under an investment programme within the North East under the company name Esh/DBC JV Limited.
21. This company takes a longer-term view and is not site specific which enables funds to be reinvested over a longer term. A number of sites are under consideration, with one site

nearly completed at Gateshead and two have commenced construction at Trimdon and Philadelphia.

22. The Gateshead site is nearly complete, with all properties available either sold or reserved.
23. The site at Trimdon (Bluebell Gardens) is progressing well with 17 of the 31 properties made available in 2025 either sold or reserved.
24. The new site at Philadelphia has recently commenced construction with 5 of the 6 properties available in 2025 sold or reserved to date.

Land Purchase – Land at Faverdale

25. The Council acquired the former St Modwen site comprising 74 acres of land to the east of Faverdale East Business Park following approval in March 2020. Cabinet agreed in October 2021 to seek expressions of interest for a preferred developer of the site. The site was marketed through informal tender but due to changes in the economic climate in late 2022 the submitted expressions of interest did not reflect best value for the Council to proceed.
26. The Council is continuing to explore uses for the site including Biodiversity Net Gain mitigation and a further report will be presented to Cabinet.

JV Neasham Road – Elder Brook Park

27. The Council entered into a JV company with our framework partners to build and sell houses at Neasham Road and agreed funding of £8.50m to facilitate this, to date £6.57m of this has been repaid to the Council. As this scheme is now in the later phases it is not expected that any further draw down of funding will be required and therefore the balance outstanding on the Investment Fund is shown as fully repaid.
28. The current projection is that this scheme will provide a higher return than the originally anticipated pre-tax profit of £1.1m, once the scheme is completed. To date £0.5m of post-tax dividend has been received.
29. The site continues to provide very high levels of interest, with 31 of the 32 properties initially made available in 2025 either sold or reserved.

Burtree Lane Garden Village

30. The Council have engaged the services of Homes by Esh the Council's JV partner to help facilitate a planning application for Council owned land at Faverdale. This forms part of Phase 1 of the Burtree Garden Village site, for which planning permission has been granted including the strategic infrastructure and spine road to open up cell CH.
31. Cell CH forms part of the Burtree Garden Village but sits outside of Phase 1, Cabinet approval was given to undertake surveys and feasibility work to support a detailed planning application.

32. Cabinet approved the Council to enter into an Infrastructure Development Agreement with Homes England in March 2025.
33. All upfront funding from the Investment Fund will be repaid through a future capital receipt.

Feethams House

34. Cabinet agreed to the repayment of £1.7m of European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) to the Government, received for the construction of Feethams House, to facilitate the use of the building by the Treasury and other government departments. This repayment was required as the change in use no longer met the ERDF funding criteria to provide high quality office accommodation to small and medium enterprises.
35. The grant is to be repaid over a three-year term and will be reimbursed through rental income received from the Darlington Economic Campus occupants. To date £1.67m has been repaid to the Investment Fund, with the balance due to be paid in 2025/26.

JV Neasham Road - Hurworth Gardens

36. Cabinet approved the establishment of the Joint Venture Company between the Council and Homes by Esh to acquire the land, deliver infrastructure and build and sell new homes at Neasham Cell C in July 2023 and agreed funding of £6.7m to facilitate this.
37. The estimated pre-tax profit share for the Council is £0.694m on completion of the scheme.
38. Sales at the site are progressing very well with 29 of the 30 properties made available in 2025 either sold or reserved.

JV Blackwell Grange

39. Cabinet approved the creation of a new Joint Venture Company between the Council and Homes by Esh to acquire land and undertake associated works to deliver housing and landscape restoration works to parkland at Blackwell in January 2024. Funding of £8.48m was agreed to facilitate the works.
40. The estimated pre-tax profit share for the Council is £0.871m on completion of the scheme.
41. Sales at the site are progressing very well with 12 of the 12 properties made available in 2025 either sold or reserved and 3 further reservations in the 2026 release.

Land at Coniscliffe Road

42. Cabinet approved the acquisition of a house, plot and orchard on Coniscliffe Road, subject to planning permission, together with the release of funding so that a detailed planning application can be submitted by Homes by ESH Ltd in March 2025.

- 43. A further report to Cabinet to consider sale terms to Home by ESH Ltd and seeking the authority for the establishment of a new Joint Venture Company will follow.
- 44. Upfront funding from the Investment Fund will be repaid through a future capital receipt.

Summary

- 45. The Investment Fund has been used for 17 schemes to date, six of which have been recycled back into the fund.
- 46. The agreed Investment Fund of £50m has a commitment against it of £35.81m, leaving a balance of £14.19m uncommitted.
- 47. The JV schemes are anticipated to generate over £8.4m in pre-tax profit dividend, of which the Council has received £4.1m post tax to date to assist the Medium Term Financial Plan, along with surplus income on loan repayments.
- 48. The Investment Fund is being utilised as envisaged facilitating wide economic benefits as well as a direct positive impact on the Councils financial position.

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**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
WORK PROGRAMME**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

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

Summary

2. Members are requested to consider the attached draft work programme (**Appendix 1**) for the next Municipal Year which has been prepared based on Officers recommendations and discussions held at the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Annual Briefing which took place on 28 May 2025.
3. Once the work programme has been approved by this Scrutiny Committee, any additional areas of work which Members wish to add to the agreed work programme will require the completion of a quad of aims in accordance with the previously approved procedure (**Appendix 3**)

Recommendation

4. Members are requested to consider and approve the attached draft work programme as the agreed work programme for the Municipal year 2025/26 and consider any additional items which they might wish to include.

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

Background Papers

There were no background papers used in the preparation of this report.

Olivia Hugill, Extension: 5363

Council Plan	The report contributes to the Council Plan in a number of ways through the involvement of Members in contributing to the delivery of the Plan.
Addressing inequalities	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The Work Programmes are integral to scrutinising and monitoring services efficiently (and effectively), however this report does not identify specific efficiency savings.
Health and Wellbeing	This report has no direct implications to the Health and Well Being of residents of Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Wards Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Ward is considered to be minimal.
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Group is considered to be minimal.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. The format of the proposed work programme has been reviewed to enable Members of this Scrutiny Committee to provide a rigorous and informed challenge to the areas for discussion.
6. The Council Plan was adopted on 18 July 2024, and outlines Darlington Borough Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for action over the next three years. It gives strategic direction to the Council and Council services, defining priorities, identifying key actions, and shaping delivery.

Forward Plan and Additional Items

7. Once the Work Programme has been agreed by this Scrutiny Committee, any Member seeking to add a new item to the work programme will need to complete a quad of aims.
8. Details of the items included on the Forward Plan has been attached at **Appendix 2** for information.

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ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

	Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Scrutiny's Role
RESOURCES				
	Performance Management Framework	Work to be undertaken to look at relevant PI's. Informal meeting to be arranged 4 September 2025 29 January 2026	Relevant Assistant Directors	To understand/monitor and challenge the indicators
	Sickness Absence Year-end turn out	To be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Committee as a briefing report	Brett Nielsen	N/A
	Health and Safety Year-end turn out	To be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Committee as a briefing report	Brett Nielsen	N/A
	Medium-Term Financial Plan - Monitoring	Quarterly monitoring reports to be submitted to meetings of this Scrutiny Committee September 2025	Brett Nielsen	To contribute and challenge the Medium-Term Financial Plan and assist with the implementation and development of the required savings

		29 January 2026		
	Medium-Term Financial Plan	January 2026	Brett Nielsen	To provide a response to Cabinet on the proposals in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan
	Capital Programme and Project Position Statement	Quarterly monitoring reports to be submitted to meetings of this Scrutiny Committee September 2025 29 January 2026	Anthony Hewitt / Brian Robson	To look at the position
	Investment Fund	4 September 2025	Brett Nielsen	To consider progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund.
	Borrowing – High Level Headlines	30 October 2025	Brett Nielsen	To look at the position
	Complaints, Compliments and Comments - Annual Report	4 September 2025	Lee Downey	To look at the position
	Complaints Made to Local Government Ombudsman	4 September 2025	Lee Downey	To consider the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) and forward any view to Cabinet
	Collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Rent 2024/25	June 2025	Anthony Sandys	To provide Members with an update on the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and Council

				rents during 2024-25 and consider the write-off of debts over £1,000 that are irrecoverable, before approval by Cabinet.
	Council Tax Support Scheme 2026-2027	30 October 2025	Anthony Sandys	To provide Members an update on the Council Tax Support Scheme 2026-2027.
ECONOMY				
	Office Demand Study (Council Assets)	30 October 2025 TBC (with officers)	TBC	To update Members of Scrutiny
	Business Engagement	8 January 2026	Seth Pearson / Andrew Perkin	To update Members of Scrutiny
	Governance Update on Market Asset Management	16 April 2026 TBC (with officers)	TBC	To update Members of Scrutiny
	Consultation on the Housing Strategy	4 September 2025	David Hand	For Members to consult on the Strategy.
	Climate Change and Nature Strategy	4 September 2025	Margaret Enstone	To present the draft Strategy to Members.

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DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
FORWARD PLAN



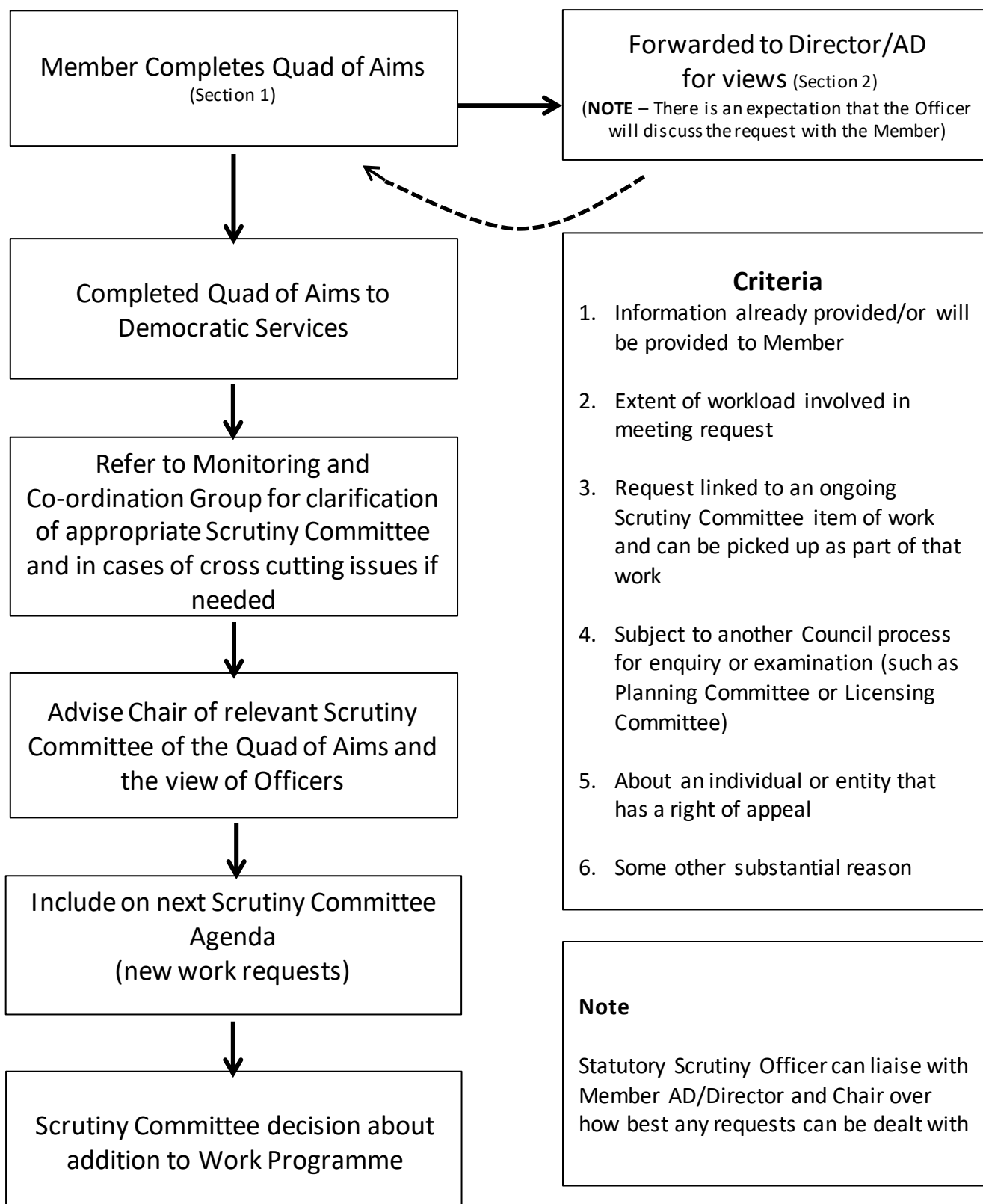
DARLINGTON
Borough Council

FORWARD PLAN
FOR THE PERIOD: 6 AUGUST 2025 - 31 DECEMBER 2025

Title	Decision Maker and Date	Page
Annual Review of the Investment Fund	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	5
Blue Badge Application Procedures	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	6
Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	7
Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2023/24	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	8
Complaints Made to Local Government Ombudsman	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	9
Dolphin Centre Asset Management and Investment Opportunities	Council 2 Oct 2025	10
	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 1 2025/26	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	12
Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	13
Revenue Budget Monitoring 2025/26 - Quarter 1	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	14
Single Use Plastic Policy	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	15
Treasury Management Annual Report and Outturn Prudential Indicators 2024/2025	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	16
Use of Land at Faverdale (Former St Modwen Land) for Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality Credits	Cabinet 9 Sep 2025	17
Community Asset Transfer Policy	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025	18
Land at Ingenium Parc and Morton Palms - Development Proposal	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025	19
Procurement Plan Update	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025	20
Schedule of Transactions	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025	21
Strategic Asset Plan	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025	22
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025	23
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025	24
Town Centre Regeneration	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025	25
Woodland Road Waiting Restrictions	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025	26
Housing Services Tenancy Policy 2025-2030	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025	27
Mid-Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management 2025/26	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025	28
MTFP for consultation	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025	29

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



PLEASE RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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

SECTION 1 TO BE COMPLETED BY MEMBERS

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

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

Signed Councillor

Date

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

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

PLEASE RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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