

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 5 March 2026

PRESENT – Councillors McGill (Chair), Beckett, Coe, Mrs Culley, Mahmud, M Nicholson, Snedker and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins and Keir

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors McCollom, Garner (Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities) and David Littlefair (Durham Constabulary)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Joanne Roberts (Principal Transport Policy Officer), Ben Grabham (Assistant Director Environmental Services and Community Safety), Chris Knox (Head of Community Safety) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

CLS27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations reported at the meeting.

CLS28 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON :-

(1) 30 DECEMBER 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 30 December 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 30 December 2025 be approved as a correct record.

(2) 6 JANUARY 2026

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 6 January 2026.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 6 January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

(3) 15 JANUARY 2026

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2026.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

CLS29 COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN 2026-2029

The Assistant Director – Environmental Services and Community Safety submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the consultation responses and the draft Community Safety Plan 2026-2029 (also previously circulated) prior to its consideration by Cabinet and Full Council.

The submitted report provided Members with details of the membership for the Community Safety Partnership (CSP); the agencies that make up the CSP have a statutory duty to work together to tackle crime and disorder; and additional members of the CSP include the County Durham and Darlington Police and Crime Commissioner and a representative from the voluntary and community sector.

It was reported that the current CSP partnership plan 2021-2026 is coming to the end of its life cycle; that the CSP consulted with the public to understand the priority areas for the community to address as part of the new plan; and the new CSP Plan will be a three-year plan (2026-2029).

Details were provided of the consultation process undertaken by the CSP to understand the public's views and perceptions on crime and anti-social behaviour and priorities for the CSP; this commenced on 13 October 2025 and concluded on 25 November 2025 and was promoted by partners via various social media platforms and an article in the One Darlington magazine. Members noted that 117 responses were received from members of the public and reference was made to the headline results. It was also noted that the CSP had also considered other consultation exercises undertaken in recent months, these included the 'Being Included In Your Community' survey.

The submitted report detailed the four priority areas in the CSP Plan, which were identified from the results of surveys coupled with intelligence data and trend analysis.

Members raised concern regarding the low response rate to the consultation. Members noted that as part of the consultation process, the CSP had also considered other consultation exercises undertaken in recent months and that the process would be reviewed in future to improve response rates. However, overall Members felt that the four priority areas identified do reflect the concerns of residents across the borough.

Discussion ensued regarding begging and enforcement in the town centre. Members were assured that compared to last year, the numbers have reduced and noted work being done to address begging; and in relation to civic enforcement and police presence in the town centre, Officers felt that this was proportionate across the borough.

Reference was made to the performance measures outlined in the draft plan, with Members highlighting that residents are hesitant to report anti-social behaviour due to perceived lack of action. Members felt that there is a need for an overarching strand within the plan to improve public understanding of and to encourage reporting of incidents.

Further discussion ensued regarding the use of drones; the targeted work to address Nitrous oxide misuse in the borough; and Members requested figures for those receiving support from the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board.

RESOLVED – (a) That the content of the report, consultation responses and the draft Community Safety Partnership Plan 2026-2029, be noted.

(b) That Cabinet be advised of this Scrutiny's view that:

- (i) Members support the four priority areas in the draft Community Safety Plan 2026-2029.
- (ii) An overarching strategy within the Community Safety Plan 2026–2029 should be developed to strengthen public confidence in reporting crime and anti-social behaviour, improve public understanding of how and when incidents should be reported, and streamline reporting mechanisms to ensure residents can easily and consistently report crime and anti-social behaviour through accessible and well-understood channels.

CLS30 ANNUAL ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POLICY REVIEW

The Assistant Director – Highways and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on electric vehicle (EV) charging following on from the adoption of the Darlington Electric Vehicle Charging Policy in February 2025.

It was reported that the Council's approach to electric vehicle charging is to provide and encourage the use of shared public facilities, with provision available in Council owned car parks; that the next phase is to create commercially operated charging hubs in community locations; and that trials are being undertaken in the Tees Valley and the UK in the development of cross pavement charging solutions.

Reference was made to the UK's EV policy and Government investment in charging infrastructure; that the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) aims to implement a comprehensive network of EV charging points in order to meet the TVCA vision as set out in the Strategic Transport Plan (STP); and the EV Infrastructure Delivery Plan sets out how the TVCA will deliver the objectives set out in the STP in relation to EV charging infrastructure.

The submitted report stated that as of October 2025, it is estimated there are 495 publicly accessible EV charge point locations in Tees Valley, consisting of 370 owned by private entities and 125 public charge points owned by TVCA; that a project for the roll out of charging points in Council owned car parks is complete, with 58 charge points installed; and TVCA issued a tender specification in early 2026, for a charge point operator to deliver and operate on-street charge points across the Tees Valley area.

The report provided details of Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding, with Members noting that the TVCA received an allocation of £6.596M; in order to satisfy the scope and conditions of the LEVI fund, the TVCA propose to procure a single Concessionaire on behalf of the five local authorities, to deliver and operate on-street charge points across the Tees Valley. Members were informed that the Concessionaire will finance, install, own, maintain and operate the on-street charging infrastructure, with 80 per cent of the agreed programme to be delivered within the first five years of the contract.

The cross-pavement solutions were outlined; details were provided of the trials being

undertaken across the Tees Valley; and the types of ownership model, installation requirements and maintenance and associated standards were outlined. Members were informed of an EV Pavement Channels grant that had been announced by the Government in August 2025 to support local authorities to install cross-pavement channels and support residents without off-street parking to charge their EV's at home. The TVCA's application for the grant was successful, with an award of £479k. Members noted the next steps.

Discussion ensued regarding the funding arrangements. Members noted that the TVCA have oversight of the LEVI capital funding allocation; that work had been undertaken to identify locations for on-street charging points across the Tees Valley, with a good coverage identified in Darlington, and the list of locations could be shared following the completion of the tender exercise.

Members raised concerns regarding the demand for chargers and ongoing costs for the Council; Members were assured that maintenance and operating costs for the on-street charging infrastructure was being covered by a concessionaire that has been proposed on behalf of the five Tees Valley authorities.

Members discussed the limitations of cross paving channels and the use of cable mats, with Officers advising that the Council will continue to monitor emerging guidance and solutions on cross-pavement EV charging and learn best practice from trials being undertaken.

RESOLVED – (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That a future review of the Electric Vehicle Charging policy be presented to Members of this Committee in March 2027.

CLS31 ACTIVE TRAVEL NEIGHBOURHOODS' FEASIBILITY REPORT

The Assistant Director – Highways and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) setting out the proposed requirements of Active Travel Neighbourhoods; and detailing the proposed requirements of Active Travel Neighbourhoods Feasibility as outlined in the draft policy (also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that Darlington has been successful at implementing initiatives to encourage walking and cycling, this includes being a Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town between 2004 and 2009 and a Cycle Demonstration Town between 2005 and 2011, with Members noting that both initiatives encouraged non-motorised trips with a result in lower overall traffic levels. Reference was also made to Lets Go Tees Valley and Personalised Travel Planning which has provided tailored information to residents about travel choices and have been effective in encouraging use of alternative modes of transport.

Reference was made to the benefits of walking and cycling and Members were advised that Active Travel Neighbourhoods Feasibility considers how improvements can be made within local communities to ensure short trips are undertaken by walking and cycling.

It was reported that government policy has been to encourage short trips by walking, wheeling and cycling, including guidance on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, Plan for Drivers; that this guidance led to a review of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods due to negative publicity

and that this review found them to be ineffective due to a lack of meaningful consultation with residents.

Members were advised that as part of the development of the Active Travel Neighbourhood Feasibility, a review of the current Department for Transport guidance has been undertaken, along with considering Active Travel England toolkits and best practice to develop measures to encourage walking and cycling; and that a comprehensive communications plan would be developed to ensure all stakeholder views are included. This would also include Member engagement.

Members made reference to the benefits of active travel neighbourhoods; and concerns were raised regarding the existing cycle routes. Members were assured that improved connectivity would encourage usage. Members noted that there is an overarching Tees Valley Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in place to deliver improvements to the transport network.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and proposed actions be noted.

CLS32 NETWORK MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Assistant Director – Highways and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) setting out the requirements and timeline for implementing a Network Management Plan.

The submitted report stated that a Network Management Plan is a statutory requirement under the Traffic Management Act 2004, setting out how a local traffic authority should manage the highway network to ensure the expeditious movement of traffic with a primary aim of reducing congestion and disruption; that as a Highway Authority, Darlington Borough Council is responsible for the management and movement of traffic on 547km of highway; and reference was made to the responsibilities in order to achieve the Network Management Duty.

Members were advised that there were no statutory timescales to update the Network Management Plan and this was undertaken when required; and details were provided of the process and programme for updating the Network Management Plan.

RESOLVED – (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That a future draft version of the Network Management Plan be presented to Members of this Committee prior to approval by Cabinet.

CLS33 WORK PROGRAMME

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

Members discussed the current work programme and requested that an update be provided on the 'Introduction of the Renters Rights Act 2025' at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee. Members received an update on the Councillor Case Monitoring System task and finish group and proposed that an update on household food waste recycling be provided at a future meeting of this committee.

Members noted that the item 'City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements Update' was covered as part of the Local Transport Plan update and could be considered for removal from the work programme in the next municipal year.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be updated to reflect discussions.