

CABINET
11 JANUARY 2022

QUARTER 2 – COUNCIL PLAN 2020-23 – DELIVERING SUCCESS FOR DARLINGTON
PERFORMANCE REPORT

Responsible Cabinet Member –
Councillor Heather Scott, Leader and all Cabinet Members

Responsible Director -
Chief Officers Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council Plan 2020-23 – Delivering Success for Darlington.
2. The report covers performance in and to the end of the first two quarters of the current financial year, from April to September 2021.

Summary

3. Delivering Success for Darlington is the Council Plan and it sets out the vision for the borough: *“Darlington is a place where people want to live and businesses want to locate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential.”* The Plan is structured around the following priorities:
 - (a) Growing Darlington’s Economy
 - (b) Maximising the Potential of our Young People
 - (c) Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential
 - (d) Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough
 - (e) A dedicated workforce who are proud to serve the borough and an accessible, effective and engaged council
4. The Performance report appended to this report outlines council performance up to the end of the second quarter of the 2021/22 financial year and is structured around the Council Plan, with:
 - (a) A high-level update on overall progress, across all portfolios, towards the overarching vision and priorities highlighted above.

- (b) An update on each Cabinet portfolio area, highlighting progress against key actions and relevant key performance indicators

Recommendation

- 5. It is recommended that Cabinet consider progress against the Council Plan 2020-23, as set out in the performance report in Appendix 1.

Reasons

- 6. The recommendation is supported as the purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the progress in implementing the Council Plan priorities.

Chief Officers Executive

Background Papers

The Council Plan 2020-23 - Delivering Success for Darlington

Natasha Telfer: Extension 6083

S17 Crime and Disorder	A number of performance indicators and key actions relating to crime and disorder are monitored as part of Council Plan performance reporting
Health and Well Being	The Council Plan outlines a number of key actions and priorities relating to improving the health and wellbeing of local residents, and so the performance report includes updates on how the Council has continued to support this over the first half of 2021/22.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	Progress towards the Council’s climate change plan is outlined in the Council plan performance report.
Diversity	Equality measures are monitored as part of the Council Plan performance monitoring process
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report outlines progress against the Council Plan and is intended to be used to help inform strategic priorities going forward.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	This report outlines progress against the Council Plan.
Efficiency	The report highlights staff an organisational effectiveness in terms of meeting the key actions and priorities laid out in the Council Plan.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	As Looked After Children and Care Leavers are highlighted as corporate priorities in the Council Plan, the performance report includes updates on how the Council has continued to support these groups over the first half of 2021/22.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. The majority of measures in this performance report demonstrate progress towards achieving the council's strategic priorities, with the remaining measures demonstrating progress towards specific key actions aligned with individual portfolios as defined in the Council Plan 2020-23.
8. In most cases, progress against individual strategic priorities relies on action and support from services spanning multiple portfolios.

Growing Darlington's Economy

9. In terms of delivering more sustainable, well-paid jobs across the borough:
 - (a) The number of jobs created increased in 2020, by 5%, in contrast to falls regionally and nationally
 - (b) The number of employed residents rose in 2021
 - (c) Average weekly wages increased in 2021, for both residents and employees
 - (d) The claimant count fell again in September, and is expected to continue falling as the local economy continues to recover from the immediate effects of the pandemic
10. The number of new businesses fell, in line with England, in 2021, but is expected to pick up again in 2022.
11. The Darlington housing market remains buoyant and, based on the number of new home completions to date this year, the Council expects to exceed the annual requirement once again in 2021/22.
12. The characteristics of the Borough contribute to creating the right conditions to attract more people to work, live and enjoy the Borough:
 - (a) The responsiveness to reports of fly tips and refuse remained high in the first half of the year, and the borough continues to score well on cleanliness measures.
 - (b) Incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour remained below pre-pandemic levels from April to September, and the Community Safety team remains proactive in working with the Police and other partners to address issues.
 - (c) The number of people injured in road casualty accidents has also continued to fall.
13. The implementation of the newly published Climate Change Strategy and action plan has helped ensure Darlington's CO2 emissions remain well below the regional average and continue to fall, reflecting significant work to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and that of the borough as a whole.
14. Considerable progress has been made towards adoption of the Local Plan over the period to support local economic growth, by giving the Council and developers confidence in future sustainable and accessible commercial and residential opportunities.

15. Delivery, with partners, of the Strategic Transport plan has continued despite the pandemic. Work to develop key projects to provide the improvements to support growth of the economy have progressed and these include the development of the Darlington Station Project, bus service improvement plans, sustainable transport initiatives, traffic management infrastructure and the availability of electric vehicle charging points are progressing. The proportion of local roads in need of maintenance also fell in 2021.

Maximising the Potential of our Young People

16. Darlington is now above the regional average for the proportion of local schools rated by Ofsted as “Good” or “Outstanding” has increased, and has no schools judged “Inadequate”.
17. In terms of removing barriers to young people reaching their potential:
 - (a) 61% of children eligible for free school meals achieve a good level of development at the end of their Reception year, above all comparator groups, and the proportion of all children achieving a good level of development at 2-2.5 years remains above the regional and national average
 - (b) No young people helped by the Council’s Youth Offending Service over the first two quarters of 2021/22 have gone on to reoffend and the number of first-time entrants to the Youth Justice System has continued to fall
18. The number of young people claiming unemployment benefits in Darlington peaked in May 2021, due to ongoing economic impacts from Covid-19, but then continuously fell to September

Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential

19. The proportion of working Darlington residents earning at least the Real Living Wage increased to 80.3% in 2021
20. A wide range of targeted interventions to support residents’ resilience, led by the Council and partners, have continued to deliver and expand over the first of the year, including The Bread and Butter Thing food waste project which is now running from seven hubs across the borough, and the School Uniform Exchange which supported hundreds of local families to dramatically cut the costs of going Back to School in September.
21. New emerging areas of focus have begun to be developed as part of the Council’s Covid-19 Recovery, including:
 - (a) scaling up the innovative Northgate Initiative – a partnership systems approach to addressing wellbeing at a neighbourhood-level – to complement national Levelling Up activity at a local level
 - (b) using the Towns Fund programme to improve local skills via the creation of a new adult learning facility
 - (c) working with partners to support local young people to take advantage of current and upcoming employment opportunities in Darlington.

Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough

22. In terms of providing care and support when needed:
- (a) The Council has won government funding to recruit additional staff to support residents at risk of homelessness.
 - (b) The number of older residents admitted to permanent residential or nursing care remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels, and the number of working age people admitted remains below comparator groups. These measures reflect the ongoing work of Adult Social Care to, wherever possible, support people to maintain their independence and remain in their own homes with support.
 - (c) The proportion of social care users and carers in receipt of self-directed support remains close to 100% and above regional and national averages.
23. The Council's Adult Social Care team have continued to demonstrate a 'Strengths Based' approach to practice and assessment, including by:
- (a) Increasing the number of bathing and/or mobility major adaptations provided to residents, and supporting the maintenance and improvement of mobility generally, and reduce the risk of falls, by encouraging service users to undertake armchair exercises
 - (b) Improving the proportion of Reablement service users who, on completion of their package, have no ongoing needs
24. The Council is working with local voluntary and community sector partners to develop a dedicated engagement forum to enable greater collaboration on programmes and initiatives to support vulnerable residents.

A dedicated workforce who are proud to serve the borough and an accessible, effective and engaged council

25. A new workforce strategy and plan, 'Working together to Deliver Success' has been developed and is now being implemented across the Council, to ensure all staff feel valued, have the right skills and are flexible and customer focused. Our four core values of Respect, Innovate, Collaborate and Deliver are at the heart of what the Council aims to consistently achieve. Immediate priorities include delivering new agile working processes, supporting employee wellbeing, and increasing apprenticeships.

Adults Portfolio

26. An evaluation of a number of small, local, voluntary sector-led initiatives to address social isolation, funded by the Council. has found positive impacts and work is being undertaken to further develop this work with partners.
27. The proportion of people with needs relating to mental health and/or learning disabilities supported by the Council to live at home or with their families remains above average, reflecting the strong ethos of the Adults service to maximise residents' independence and wellbeing.

28. A number of interventions to promote and increase the use of assistive technology have continued to be delivered over the period, including:
- (a) Piloting new digital self-management tools to support users' independence
 - (b) Supporting residents with sensory impairments to identify and provide equipment to improve their quality of life
 - (c) Increasing the proportion of referrals for assistive technology that result in equipment being provided.

Children and Young People Portfolio

29. Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) have continued to receive excellent services over the first half of 2021/22, including:
- (a) Delivery of 31 new placements for pupils with SEND across two new facilities in Red Hall and Rise Carr
 - (b) An increase in the proportion of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) educated in mainstream schools, reflecting our SEND strategy's ambition of educating SEND pupils, where possible, in their local community with the right support.
 - (c) Remaining above the national average for percentage of new EHCPs issued within twenty weeks
30. Work to minimise the need for children to be taken into care has continued, with the number of Looked After Children 12% lower in September 2021 than the year before, reflecting:
- (a) Positive work by the Children's Service Front Door team to ensure safe decisions are taken to safeguard children at the earliest available opportunity
 - (b) The relational practice of the Council's Strengthening Families programme which has continued to implement timely interventions to support families to stay together
 - (c) Success in reducing the number of Looked After Children by finding positive outcomes including adoption, Special Guardianship Orders and, where appropriate, working with families so that children can return home.
31. The total number of in-house foster placements available, as of September 2021, was higher than at the same time last year and is anticipated to grow further with nine families currently going through the foster carer assessment process as a result of a major campaign, including social media advertisements and online information events, to encourage more prospective foster carers to come forward.
32. The Council's residential homes for children have been incorporated into its new build programme, with the first move due in May 2022. Plans have also been finalised to repurpose the existing property into a residential short-breaks service to provide early targeted support to families to further reduce the need for children to be taken into care.
33. The proportion of care leavers who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) has continued to fall in 2021, and remains significantly below the average for England, the North East and statistical neighbours.

34. Despite youth unemployment increasing as a result of the pandemic, as elsewhere, the Council's Youth Employment Initiative service has continued to deliver high numbers of positive progressions and sustained destinations for participants, and the youth claimant count has been falling since May 2021. The proportion of working-age residents claiming Universal Credit for more than a year has also been falling since May 2021 and, as of September, was below the regional average.
35. Since March 2021, two of Darlington's secondary schools have been Ofsted inspected and had their ratings upgraded from "Requires Improvement" to "Good".
36. 115 new Year 6 pupils have been signed up to the Council's In2 programme. The project supports disadvantaged children to participate in arts, leisure and cultural opportunities to maximise their potential, and the first activity delivered in September was a theatre heritage project in the Hullabaloo.
37. A comprehensive Holiday Activities and Food programme was delivered across the Borough over the Easter and Summer school holidays, with an exciting timetable including trips to the Dolphin Centre, Head of Steam Museum and Darlington Hippodrome and a nutritious cooked meal provided for participants each day. The government has confirmed funding for the programme for the next 3 years.

Economy Portfolio

38. The first phase of improvements to the covered market opened in August 2021 and a great deal of positive feedback has been received from local residents and visitors. The outdoor market was also relocated to High Row which has led to an increase in the number of market traders.
39. Progress has been made over the period on a number of acquisitions of strategically positioned buildings and land in the town centre, to support delivery of the Town Centre Strategy, have taken place including the residential Skinnergate development and with the anticipated acquisition of the former Northern Echo building.
40. Key economic sites across the borough have continued to be developed so they are investor ready, including Faverdale Business Park, the National Biologics Centre, the Innovation Central site, Ingenium Park, and Central Park.
41. A temporary lease between the Treasury and Darlington Borough Council for Feethams House has been agreed, with Treasury and other government departments' staff due to start populating the building in early 2022/23.
42. Following Darlington Borough Council's successful allocation of government Covid-19 Additional Restrictions Grants to local businesses, a bonus grant of £631,000 has been received which is being used to further support and encourage start-ups and indigenous companies to grow.
43. Significant progress has been made with regards to the draft Local Plan, with formal hearings now complete and, following a public consultation on consequent modifications, it is expected the inspector will finalise their report before the end of the year.

44. Darlington housebuilding starts were up by 108 units and completions by 49 from March to September 2021 compared to the same period the previous year.
45. The capacity of the Council's Climate Change team has doubled in the first of 2021/22, with the recruitment of a new Climate Change Officer.
46. The Darlington Station project has advanced, with a strong delivery partnership, including Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), Network Rail, the Department for Transport and train operators now in place. Various planning permissions have been secured, the detailed design and land acquisition stages of the programme are progressing and improvements to the public realm and sustainable transport links on Victoria Road have been completed.

Health and Housing Portfolio

47. As Covid-19 limitations have been relaxed, the Dolphin Centre has reopened in line with ongoing national restrictions with customers returning to use the facilities, with the data showing dramatic increases in visitor numbers over the course of 2021, from 3,100 in March 2021 to 60,541 in September 2021, a nearly twenty-fold rise.
48. Local Outbreak Control meetings have continued to operate as required to deliver the Local Outbreak Plan. Darlington is also part of a Local Tracing Partnership with NHS Test & Trace with dedicated capacity to follow up hard-to-reach contacts and cases in Darlington.
49. 100% of Darlington Borough Council social housing stock continued to meet the Decent Homes Standard over the first half of 2021/22 and, despite pandemic-related disruption to housebuilding, a new scheme was delivered in 2020/21.
50. Rent collection rates for Council housing have remained higher than previous years and within expected levels, and officers continued to promote help and guidance, make affordable repayment plans, and assist with benefit claims and budgeting skills from March to September 2021.
51. 19 of the 28 actions outlined in Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy have now been completed. The Council has also successfully increased the number of temporary accommodation units by 36% to help meet growing demand resulting from the pandemic, successfully bid for additional government funding to recruit additional staff to deliver support and advice services to homeless people and been recognised by the NEPACS Ruth Cranfield Award for our dedication to housing and success in tackling homelessness during the pandemic.
52. The Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan has delivered, with partners, a number of evidence-based interventions to address the root causes of child obesity in Darlington including working with local schools and commercial premises to develop and roll out a healthy catering standard across the borough.
53. The percentage of Darlington 5 year olds with visually obvious dental decay has been falling for the past three years, and a new toothbrushing scheme has been delivered to support further progress.

54. The proportion of Darlington residents smoking fell slightly in 2020 and remains below regional and national averages, and work continues through the Council's commissioned Stop Smoking service to encourage and support residents to quit.
55. The Council's Lifeline team won the Stronger Communities award for 'Exceptional Care' and has restarted tenant engagement sessions and resident activities as Covid-19 restrictions have continued to be lifted.

Local Services Portfolio

56. The plan for the 2025 celebrations is being developed, with a core programme proposed to include live steam and motive power, early steam locomotives exhibitions, educational projects, community events and large-scale outdoor arts and street theatre.
57. The town centre has continued to attract visitors and residents in the first half of the year, with:
 - (a) Sixteen town centre events were held over the period, up from zero in 2020, including Pride, the Vintage Vehicle Rally and a range of food and music festivals
 - (b) Close to 100% of town centre areas passing litter inspections in each of the six months
58. A planning application for the Rail Heritage Quarter has been developed and submitted, with determination due in January 2022.
59. The Crown Street Library refurbishment and modernisation project has commenced on site, with work being undertaken to repair the building's roof and structure, upgrade mechanical and electrical installations and sympathetically restore the library interior.
60. The town centre parking offer has continued throughout the period, to support Covid-19 recovery, and a new parking strategy is under development.
61. The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan has now been agreed and a prospectus submitted to government to secure over £300m transport investment in the next 5 years across the sub-region. Recent updates of the programme include development of key road projects, ongoing delivery of the Darlington Station site, submission of a Bus Service Improvement Plan, and further development of walking and cycling schemes on Duke Street and Woodland Road.
62. The refurbishment of the crematorium, to include a new chapel, began on-site in June and is anticipated to be complete by Spring 2022.

Resources Portfolio

63. The draft Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 - 2025/26 is now out for consultation and is showing an affordable four-year position.
64. The Investment Fund provision of £50m is being utilised for Joint Venture (JV) and economic regeneration initiatives. The Council has invested in six JVs for house building to date, with all sites progressing well, and anticipated returns of over £6m.

65. The percentage of local council tax and business rates collected are expected to meet their year-end target.
66. More than a third of the Council's contracted spend in the first two quarters, equating to over £17.6M, was with Darlington-based suppliers. A new local anchor network has also been established with the Council's local public sector partners, to further develop a joint approach to maximising social value and local spend in procurement by developing a joined-up approach based on shared priorities for Darlington.
67. More than 100 council services are now available online and new online services have continued to be rolled out, included a new "Report it" facility which is ensuring a quicker response to public concerns. The growth in online functionality correlates with a growth in visitor numbers to the Council's website compared to pre-pandemic, which has also undergone improvements with new information and functions, easier to understand content and better navigation all delivered in the first half of the year.

Stronger Communities Portfolio

68. 4,302 volunteer hours were delivered in the first two quarters of 2020/21 by Darlington Cares members, compared to 0 hours over the same period last year when the majority of organisations were unable to release staff. As restrictions are lifted the pre-pandemic programme is being rebooted, including the popular Pick, Pie and a Pint litter picks, new volunteering opportunities are being explored, and discussions are being held with prospective new member organisations.
69. Following the pandemic, the Northgate Initiative – an innovative multi-agency programme to improve local wellbeing across a range of domains – is being reviewed by the steering group to refresh the programme's structure and focus and ensure it reflects emerging priorities.
70. There are now seven The Bread and Butter Thing hubs established in key areas of Darlington which, as of the end of September 2021, have provided local families with 21,421 sets of groceries, equating to 257 tonnes of food, 610,000 meals, and have collectively saved households nearly £600,000 in food costs.
71. The Council's Civic Enforcement team have successfully won funding from all three government 'Safer Streets' funds, enabling significant resource to be targeted at burglary-prevention, increasing CCTV coverage, and preventing violence against women and girls.
72. The proportion of Darlington residents who are in need of alcohol and/or drugs treatment but estimated not to be in it is below the national average and falling.
73. Reported town centre crime, incidents and anti-social behaviour were all down by approximately a third in the first two quarters of 2021 compared to the same period pre-pandemic, in 2019. Reflecting this positive performance, officers have prepared a renewal application for Purple Flag status, a national accreditation scheme that identifies town and city centres that meet or surpass the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night-time economy.

74. More than half of staff and two-thirds of Members have now received equality and diversity training. Feedback from the bespoke half-day training has been overwhelmingly positive and since its inception the proportion of staff who agree that the Council takes equality and diversity issues seriously has increased from 93% to 96%.
75. Two separate partnership studies to assess flood risk across the borough are underway and will be used to inform bids for funding to implement preventative solutions. Work has also been undertaken with the Environment Agency to remove debris from the Skerne to minimise flooding risk.