

CABINET
8 FEBRUARY 2022

LEVELLING UP DARLINGTON

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Jonathan Dulston, Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval for the development of a Levelling Up Darlington Plan to be developed, led by Darlington Borough Council with public partner agencies.

Summary

2. The UK government is committed to levelling up across the whole of the United Kingdom to ensure that no community is left behind, particularly as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. The Levelling Up Darlington Plan aims to maximise the benefit to Darlington and its residents of Government investment. Particularly it will aim to support residents of the communities most in need in Darlington and those whose employment has been adversely affected by Covid-19 to access quality employment.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The Levelling Up Darlington Framework is agreed
 - (b) The areas for priority action are agreed
 - (c) Work with partner agencies commences to develop a programme and action plan
 - (d) A Levelling Up Darlington launch event is held.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) The Levelling Up Darlington plan will help deliver the priorities of the Council Plan

(b) The Plan will maximise the benefits to Darlington of Government investment.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

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

Seth Pearson: Extension 5408

S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact
Health and Wellbeing	The proposed plan would improve community health and wellbeing
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No impact
Diversity	No impact
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	No impact
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	The plan would aim to support delivery towards the priorities of the Council Plan
Efficiency	No impact
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

6. Many of the issues identified in the levelling Up Darlington analysis are longstanding and the Council has already instigated action to address them articulated in the Council Plan.
7. Growing the Economy is recognized as a fundamental measure to address the challenges highlighted in the report. A substantial house building programme is underway to attract younger, working age, families which will help counterbalance the aging population ratio. There has been major success in bringing employment to Darlington with Amazon setting up a major facility and 1700 jobs soon to be created by Government relocations.
8. Maximising the potential of all our young people will in the long term improve the overall wealth and wellbeing of the borough. Dedicated work is underway to ensure that young people in Darlington are able to take best advantage of the employment opportunities available to them. But supporting the most vulnerable in our community now is vitally important.
9. The Council has invested in a range of interventions to support struggling families such as the Bread and Butter Thing and The Uniform Exchange Scheme etc. Of course the pandemic has exacerbated some existing areas of concern and introduced new ones.
10. The Levelling Up Darlington Plan aims to ensure all of our communities can access opportunities and lead happy and healthy lives.

UK Government levelling up and community investment

11. The UK Government is now making changes to the way it supports local economic growth in order to regenerate town centres and high streets, support individuals into employment, improve local transport links and invest in local culture.
12. In doing this the government aims to decentralise power and work more directly with local partners and communities who they see as best placed to understand the needs of their local areas and more closely aligned to the local economic geographies.

Levelling Up Darlington Plan

13. It is proposed that a 'Levelling up Darlington' plan is developed. This would focus on maximising the social and economic benefits arising from economic recovery and the Government's 'Levelling Up' proposals are accessible to all Darlington communities.
14. A common theme of researchers analysing the impact of Covid-19 is that there is a vital need for strategic, place-based cooperation between local partners, led by the public sector to collectively:
 - (a) Develop a shared long-term vision and approach to recovery, ensuring that this includes a focus on addressing health and income inequalities

- (b) Inform how agencies deploy their resources and use any additional discretionary funding
 - (c) Action plan, based around best practice and led by evidence.
15. In addition, public sector agencies have long recognised the interconnected nature of the issues they face, and that inequality and deprivation are core drivers of demand.
16. The plan is based around the Thriving Places Index framework and indicator set. (Vision and Framework at **Appendix 1**). Understanding of local need will also be enhanced via analysis of additional data and local intelligence.
17. The Northgate Initiative provides a valuable model for the plan and inter-agency cooperation and will continue to act as a test bed for developing interventions.

Priorities for Action

18. The vision for Levelling Up Darlington is “Darlington is a place where residents, no matter where in the borough they live, have the same opportunity to make the best of their talents and live a healthy and happy life as any other part of the UK.”
19. To achieve this vision, it is proposed that a programme of action would be developed with partners prioritising the following:
- (a) Quality Jobs: attracting more to Darlington and assisting people from more deprived communities accessing them.
 - (i) DBC Inward Investment Team is successfully attracting employers to Darlington bringing a greater volume of quality jobs.
 - (ii) The deficit is in supporting people to develop their employability skills to access these jobs. Analysis before the pandemic in 2019 indicated that a significant issue in Darlington was under-employment rather than unemployment, i.e. people (particularly young families) in low-paid insecure employment with fluctuating income. Unsurprisingly, there are high numbers of these families in the less affluent areas of town.
 - (iii) Potential actions: An Adult learning facility is proposed as part of the Towns Fund initiative. The focus of this facility could be career development. The Adult Learning Budget could be used to provide tailored pre-employment courses which included input from local employers who were recruiting, ideally with guaranteed interviews on completion of the course.
 - (iv) Indicator: reduction in number of in-work Universal Credit claimants.
 - (b) Improving the prospects of young people from deprived communities through better qualifications, aspirations and confidence:
 - (i) The Youth Employment Task Group has endorsed this as a priority and recognise it as a natural extension of its work. Analysis commissioned by the

group (see **attached**) illustrates a dramatic increase in 16 to 24 year old unemployed Universal Credit claimants which are highly spatial concentrated. There has been particularly dramatic increases in Skerne Park, Albert Hill and Firthmoor, as well as Branksome and areas of Stephenson and North Road Wards.

- (ii) Potential actions: The 11 to 19 group of secondary schools and colleges in Darlington would be invited to take a leading role in oversight of a programme. Two areas of focus would be how the wider curriculum could be augmented and what additional resources could be secured. The TVCA are looking to develop a more dispersed approach in this area, which may help with resourcing.
 - (iii) Indicator: reduction in unemployed and in work Universal Credit claims for 16 to 24 year olds from deprived communities. (whilst this is a useful top line indicator, further work could be undertaken with Teesside University to develop a more qualitative assessment of confidence and aspiration).
- (c) Improving Health, particularly mental health:
- (i) Pre-Covid, there continued to be a high correlation between deprived Wards and higher incidences of poor health behaviours and outcomes.
 - (ii) Child obesity has increased at a faster rate than elsewhere since 2017/18.
 - (iii) Healthy life expectancy has fallen at a faster rate than elsewhere since 2015-17, & for males is now below regional & national averages at 58.
 - (iv) Estimated mental health service contacts since May 2020 have increased 13% for Under 19s, 23% for working-age residents, but fallen 3% for 65+.
 - (v) Darlington Primary Care Network are investing £2 million in creating a 'Living Well' outreach team. The Team will look to work with groups with particular conditions but also will focus work in deprived communities.
 - (vi) Darlington Primary Care Network would like to work with Darlington Borough Council to undertake an engagement and consultation exercise to help focus the work of the Living Well Team.
 - (vii) Indicator: to be developed with PCN.

20. The advantages of focusing on the above as priorities are that they:

- (a) Directly deliver towards Council Plan priorities.
- (b) Address the issues highlighted in a recently compiled profile report.
- (c) Are areas that build on existing activity or where additional action can be instigated.
- (d) Have a strong potential to engage partners.
- (e) Provide clarity when seeking resources.
- (f) Will make a difference long term.

Consultation

21. Public sector agencies have been consulted on the approach proposed in the Vision and Framework through the Public Sector Executives Group.
22. At the meeting of 12 January 2022, the Youth Employment Task Group voiced their support for the priorities for action, particularly “Improving the prospects of young people from deprived communities through better qualifications, aspirations and confidence”.

Outcome of Consultation

23. The plan is supported by the Public Sector Executives Group.