

**CABINET**  
**3 JULY 2023**

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**QUARTER 4 – COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2023 – DELIVERING SUCCESS FOR DARLINGTON**  
**PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -**  
**Leader Councillor Harker and all Cabinet Members**

**Responsible Director -**  
**Chief Officers Executive**

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**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 last two quarters of the previous financial year, from October 2022 to March 2023.

**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 final quarter of the 2022/23 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
5. The current Council Plan set the Council priorities for 2020-23. Work will shortly commence on the development of a new Council Plan and brought to a future meeting.

### **Recommendation**

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

### **Reasons**

7. 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 2020-2023 – Delivering Success for Darlington.

Lynne Davies: Extension 5070

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 Wellbeing	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 priority.
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.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. The performance of the Council Plan is assessed against a set of agreed indicators for the period 2020-2023. Measures in this performance report demonstrate progress towards achieving the Council's strategic 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.
9. The remaining measures demonstrate progress towards specific key actions aligned with individual portfolios as defined in the Council Plan 2020-23:
    - (a) Adults
    - (b) Children and Young People
    - (c) Economy
    - (d) Health and Housing
    - (e) Local Services
    - (f) Resources
    - (g) Stronger Communities
  10. Progress against individual strategic priorities often relies on action and support from services spanning multiple portfolios. There is also collaborative action to deliver priorities with key stakeholders in Darlington and beyond through groups the Council leads including PSEG, Voluntary Sector and Sustainable Communities, Health and Wellbeing Board; and in partnerships with individual organisations for example Tees Valley Combined Authority.
  11. The Stronger Communities Board had its inaugural meeting on the 16 November 2022 and provides the Council with new arrangements for engaging public, private and voluntary sectors; bringing together civic leaders from different sectors and setting strategic direction and uniting behind common goals by fostering collaboration.
  12. At its first meeting the board launched the Levelling Up Darlington plan which aims to support the Council to achieve priorities laid out in the Council Plan: assisting people from more deprived communities access quality jobs; access to opportunities for young people and reducing health inequalities.
  13. The economic climate has presented new and significant challenges to the Council's budgets from rising inflation, interest rates and energy costs. It is still a challenging time for residents, communities and businesses feeling the legacy of Covid alongside these most recent pressures and the rising cost of living. This has led to increases in demand for Council services, more complex needs, and pressures on workforce and budgets, in particular for the Children and Young People, and Adults portfolios

## **Priorities**

### **Priority 1: Growing Darlington's Economy**

14. The Council has remained focused on delivering more sustainable, well-paid jobs across the Borough. The relocation of HMT Treasury and other government departments to Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) is proving a significant catalyst for growth across the Borough. This has been evidenced by two recent reports by the Institute for Government and the Council commissioned report by Urban Foresight. The Council continues to work with the Government Property Agency to deliver the permanent office location for DEC.
15. The Council continues to receive a healthy number of enquiries for quality office space in the town centre and has several projects in development to meet this demand.

16. Post-covid confidence is returning and demand for goods and services is increasing. However, given the general economic climate this recovery is fragile:
  - (a) Total employment (including self-employment) has grown, but the rate of growth has slowed and is lower than the regional average.
  - (b) Unemployment is now 4.3%, significantly down from the peaks during Covid 19.
  - (c) New business registration rates increased to 64.4 from a low of 40.1 in 2020.
17. Work continued across many service areas to create the conditions to attract more people to work, live and enjoy the Borough. Housing delivery continues to be strong within the Borough at 495 for the year, despite ongoing challenges with Nutrient Neutrality this has exceeded the local plan annual target.
18. The cleanliness of the town centre has continued to be at a very high standard with street cleansing teams delivering an average of 97% small fly tips removals within their target time and 94% for large fly tips. The introduction of an additional back lane crew has made a significant impact.
19. Recorded crime for 2022/23 increased 6.7% from the same period last year however it is still 8% lower than the same period pre-pandemic. The increases are mostly attributed to shoplifting and burglary. There have been 2455 reported antisocial behaviour incidents which is down 24.6% on the previous year, but changes to recording standards mean this year's data is not directly comparable.
20. Inequality in life expectancy at birth is the difference in life expectancy between the most and least deprived, and it has widened in 2020 for males and females in Darlington. The gap is 10.6 years for females and 13 years for males. These averages are statistically similar to the Northeast region but worse than the English average.
21. The Council is below the self-set emissions trajectory and is developing an offsetting strategy to close the gap between where the impact of the Council's actions and carbon neutral. Members and officers continue to work together to address any outstanding actions. Cabinet has also recently approved the Adaptations report.
22. The Council continues to invest in road safety education, speed management and casualty reduction schemes through the Local Transport Plan. Data from 2022 shows investment in road maintenance has continued and the percentage of the A-road network where maintenance should be considered is 1.47% which is significantly lower than the regional and national averages; and at 5.3% the percentage of B and C class roads where maintenance should be considered is better than the national average but lower than the North East.
23. Arriva announced a series of bus service reductions that have the potential to impact on public transport accessibility which will impact people's ability to access the town centre, business areas, education facilities and other services. Tees Valley Combined Authority is the Local Transport Authority responsible for considering the public transport needs across the Tees Valley and the provision of subsidised services where they are not commercially viable. The Council is working with TVCA and making a case to them for the retention of

public transport coverage in the areas affected. Further updates will be provided on the decision by TVCA in relation to these services

## **Priority 2 - Maximising the Potential of our Young People**

24. The Council works with partners to maximise education achievement. The Borough's Ofsted rating is improving, 81.1% (30 out of 37) of schools in Darlington with an Ofsted rating are rated Good or Outstanding, up from 75.7% in March 2022.
25. The latest data for the development of children at 2- 2 ½ years shows 95.9% children in 2021/22 achieving a good level of development which is significantly higher than the national average 81.1%, and as Darlington is increasing and England declining the gap is widening.
26. 2021-2022 saw a return to formal assessment in primary schools and external examinations and accreditation in secondary schools:
  - (a) At primary level the data suggests overall attainment and progress is lower than expected compared with regional and national indicators. Also the number of children in primary schools is falling and this is putting additional financial pressures on schools.
  - (b) There was less variation in performance of secondary schools than in years prior to the pandemic. Attainment 8 score for Performance was slightly higher than regional and national averages, and the average score for Progress was higher than the regional average but lower than national. Attainment 8 is a measure of a pupil's average grade across a set of eight subjects.
27. The number of first-time entrants into the Youth Justice System has risen to 34 people (by 79%) compared with 19 the previous year, this is linked to the gravity of some offences leading young people straight to court. The Young People's Engagement and Justice Service had 61 young people referred for diversionary disposals over the last year, with a 90% success rate of young people not reoffending.
28. Average youth unemployment (the 18-24 claimant count) is 7.7%, down from 13.8% peak in May 2020 during Covid 19, but is significantly higher than the average for the working age population which has fallen to 4.3%, also down from peaking during Covid.
29. A multi-agency group established to address this issue chaired by the Chief Executive continues to meet, and oversaw the appointment of Youth Employment UK (YEUK) to support the Council in its approach to youth unemployment. YEUK has mapped existing provision, created a digital platform to provide young people with access to opportunities, launched a Youth Friendly Darlington campaign to encourage take up of the Young Professional Programme, including access to the Digital Hub and confidence-building support to use the resource to find local services, training and employment opportunities.
30. YEUK has also been working with local employers to encourage them to sign up to be a youth-friendly employer and make their opportunities youth friendly using the Good Youth Employment Charter. The contract with them has been renewed for 2023 -24 to focus on embedding Youth Friendly Darlington and the digital platform within mainstream delivery.

### **Priority 3: Working with Communities to Maximise their Potential**

31. The Council provides targeted support where needed, particularly to help with the cost of living pressures faced by residents. Darlington BEAT, a service funded by the Council and delivered by the Citizen's Advice Bureau, supported people to identify and apply for eligible benefits. In 2022/23 benefits worth just under £1.8m were identified for eligible residents, the highest was Personal Independence Payments at £1.133m followed by Universal Credit (£359k), Disability Living Allowance (97k), Housing and Council Tax (£55k) and Pension Credits (£35k).
32. Demand for the Uniform Exchange Scheme, which was initially set up as a means of supporting people through Covid, continues to grow. Between October 2022 and March 2023 the Uniform Exchange scheme had 1793 customers, with 4018 items given out.
33. The 'Let's do digital' initiative has now closed after 2 years of delivery. Over the course of the project over 35 refurbished devices (PCs, tablets and phones) were distributed to care leavers, learners and other digitally excluded residents. Whilst the scheme will not continue in its current form, learning from this pilot will be carried into future digital inclusion work.
34. There has also been collaboration with residents to improve our communities. The Big Spring Clean 2022 campaign was a success and led to more volunteers signing up to support the programme, there are now 522 active street champions.

### **Priority 4: Supporting the Most Vulnerable in the Borough**

35. Adult social care has been taking a strength-based approach to practice and assessment to help meet the duty to 'prevent, delay or reduce' the need for formal support. Support plans have been produced and the use of aids and adaptations is encouraged to ensure people can remain independent for as long as possible.
36. 100% of carers using social care received self-directed support exceeding regional and national averages, and 96.8% of clients using social care were receiving self-directed support. This approach maximises peoples' choice and control to ensure services best suit their needs and preferences.
37. RIACT is a joint approach between social workers and health teams to assessment, provision, and support; identifying the best solutions to peoples' assessed needs and along with community and voluntary sector provision, delivers effective outcomes in keeping people in their own homes and independent as long as possible. The percentage of people who have no ongoing care needs following completion of a reablement package decreased to 51.9%. Of the remaining individuals 24.4% had decreased needs, 17.6% increased and 6.1% stayed the same.
38. Strong working relationships have been established with the voluntary sector, a liaison group has been set up to enable more collaborative working providing advice on the Levelling Up Darlington Plan and delivering a £200,000 programme for the Household Support Fund.

39. There have been increases in the number of people in age groups 18-64 and 65+ admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care homes. The service will continue its focus on reducing the number of people needing long term care to enable them to return to their homes with appropriate support and with work with commissioning to address capacity issues in the provider market.
40. The Council successfully delivered the third round of Household Support Fund grant provided by the Department of Work and Pensions totalling £913,853. The majority of the provision was through third sector providers who were able to target those most in need of support. Of the 11,927 households supported there were: 7,327 households with children; 857 households with people of pensionable age; and 2,387 households with people with disabilities.

**Priority 5: A dedicated workforce who are proud to serve the borough and an accessible, effective and engaged council**

41. The workforce is committed to delivering success for Darlington. The workforce strategy 'Working together to deliver success' outlines how the Council will develop, support and motivate staff to ensure the priorities of businesses and the community are met. Key areas delivered include the management development programme, implementation of flexible and agile working and supporting staff wellbeing.
42. Corporate inductions are prioritised as a key communication route for ensuring Council priorities are understood across all service areas, they are led by the Chief Executive and Directors, and this year 160 people have attended an induction. Monitoring implementation and embedding the strategy and values is ongoing through employee surveys, wellbeing statistics, customer feedback, workforce performance and development of staff communication.

**Portfolios**

**Adults**

43. Adult Social Care has seen unprecedented pressures within the last 3 years due to factors including the legacy of the Covid pandemic resulting in increased requests for social care, increased complexity and greater dependency of people. Subsequently there has been significant workforce retention and high levels of workforce vacancies within the social care sector, although these are now coming down. These pressures led to waiting lists for people waiting for an assessment and increased numbers of people moving into permanent residential care as the care market struggles to manage demand and capacity, but waiting lists are also coming down as workforce pressures reduce.
44. New regulatory powers to assess local authorities were given to CQC (Care Quality Commission) by the Health and Care Act 2022. CQC's role is to assess how well a local authority is delivering duties under part 1 of the Care Act. CQC engaged on the approach for more than 12 months to develop the Local Authority assessment framework which was issued in March 2023 with 5 pilot Local Authorities undertaking the first baseline assessments from April 2023. The roll out of inspections for all Local Authorities commences in September 2023. The Service is preparing for the assurance framework by completing a baseline assessment, developing a 3 year transformation strategy and action



plan around the key assurance themes of quality, engagement, providing support, ensuring safe systems and leadership.

45. The service continued to support the most vulnerable adults in our society, helping them remain in their own homes and maximising their independence. Positive outcomes have been achieved from all teams, in particular the reablement and discharge from hospital offer.
46. Adult social care teams continued to work with the NHS to support people to return home following discharge from hospital. The proportion of older people who are still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement or rehabilitation services is 81%. This is a consistently high outcome delivered by the service and is higher than the regional average.
47. The proportion of adults with a learning disability who live in their own home or with their family at 95.1% is significantly higher than regional and national averages (2021/22).
48. A digital strategy is in development and assistive technology is consistently offered to clients. For example there is new equipment for Vane House with a focus on sensory, and the Virtual House project demonstrates examples of occupational therapy, assistive technology and sensory aids that could help people do daily activities at home.
49. Since April 2022, 315 out of 389 (81%) Assistive Technology Toolkit Referrals assigned to Lifeline resulted in equipment being provided. Teams continue to promote this offer at the point of referral to adult social care as well as at reviews.
50. Work has continued to deliver modern transformed Adult Social Care that results in positive outcomes including refreshing the Strength Based Practice Model; continuing to develop a transformation strategy and plan for the next 3 years, and review the digital offer for information, advice and guidance; and developing new feedback mechanisms.

## **Children and Young People**

51. Whilst there has been significant and sustained increases in demand creating significant pressure on the workforce, focus remained on ensuring that every child in Darlington has the best start in life so that children and young people can grow and flourish. Contributing factors to this increased demand include the medium term impact of the Covid pandemic, significant rises in the cost of living and child poverty.
52. In Children's Services there has been increased numbers of children and families requiring help and support and of circumstances where there are safeguarding concerns. This has increased workloads across all of Children's Services, the number of contacts received (situations where support is requested or concerns are shared) increased by 13% compared to 2021/22 and 36% when compared with 2019/20, prior to the Covid pandemic. This led to an increase in referrals for social work assessment and support of 56% compared to 2021/22 and 51% when compared with 2019/20. The number of children who are Looked After has increased by 15% compared to 2021/22 and 17% compared with 2019/20.

53. In education, requests for assessment for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) have risen over the last year, there has been a 34% increase in the number of requests to assess for an EHCP since 2021. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in Darlington schools has risen to a 5-year high in both primary and secondary settings. There has also been an increase in absence across the board for both phases of education, which is mirrored regionally and nationally; and the number of children known to be electively home educated has increased from 194 in March 2022 to 253 in March 2023.
54. The Council continues to provide services to children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND):
  - (a) The rate of EHCPs excluding exceptions, issued within the 20-week statutory timeline is 86% which is above regional and national comparators.
  - (b) More children with SEND are attending mainstream school settings. The percentage of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) educated in mainstream schools has risen from 32.8% in 2018 to 38.4% in 2022, which is above the regional average of 32.6%.
  - (c) The Council successfully bid for a special free school and work has begun with the Department for Education to identify a sponsor trust to run the school.
  - (d) The Council has entered into a Safety Valve Agreement with the Department for Education to address the historic deficit on the High Needs Block. The High Needs Block achieved a balance in the 2022/23 financial year.
55. The Darlington Strengthening Families Programme continues to be implemented. There were 322 children being supported in Council care (Looked After Children) in March 2023, 5.3% of which came into care after being accepted by the Home Office as UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child). When you exclude UASC from the figures there has been an 12.9% increase in the number of children in care since March 2022.
56. 126 children from 86 families and 18 UASC young people came into care in 2022/23 and 100 children and young people ceased to be in care, 39% of which went to live with a relative.
57. 50% of children in care were with a foster placement at the end of March 2023, 23.9% in kinship care with relatives, 13.3% were with parents, 14% in residential accommodation and 2.5% placed for adoption. The proportion of children placed with a parent or kinship carer has been increasing.
58. There are currently 54 approved foster carers, 24 kinship carers and 14 families with temporary approval. Recruitment continues to be a challenge which is an impact of Covid and reflected nationally. At the end of March 2023, 213 children and young people were placed with a foster care family and 6 families were undertaking assessments to become approved foster carers.
59. The re-purposing of the Council's existing children's home remains ongoing, with a planned visit from Ofsted to secure the new home early in the next financial year. Children

will be moved there from Eldon which will be repurposed to provide earlier targeted support.

60. The proportion of Darlington care leavers Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at the end of March 2023 was 21.8%. This has been reducing annually for a number of years and is significantly lower than regional and national averages. 16% of the Council's care leavers are in further education and 61.8% are in employment.
61. Referrals to the Youth Employment Initiative remains steady over the last year with young people continuing to move into education, employment and training. The initiative continues to perform well and has exceeded the academic year targets ahead of time, however youth unemployment remains high, see paragraph 27.
62. Work continued to increase attainment across the Borough in particular for young people from deprived backgrounds. 81.1% (30 out of 37) of schools in Darlington with an Ofsted rating are rated Good or Outstanding; and the inequality gap between KS4 Attainment 8 average scores for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils has decreased from 17.9 to 16.9, which is lower than the regional average.
63. The Council has continued to deliver holiday programmes for young people throughout the summer and winter holidays supporting over 1000 children in multiple venues across the Borough, and over 10% of the summer holiday attendees were SEND. The In2 Project supported children from Northwood Primary, Firthmoor Primary and Corporation Road Primary to participate in art, leisure and cultural programmes and they will be twinned with schools from around the world.

## **Economy**

64. Work continued to create the conditions to attract new businesses, help our indigenous businesses to grow and maximise employment opportunities for Darlington residents.
65. Market Asset Management (MAM) has continued with the investment in both the indoor and outdoor market with phase 1 and 2 complete. Phase 3 includes work on the traditional indoor retail area and will start late summer. Trading conditions are challenging but footfall in the street food phase is holding up well with increasing trader presence at outdoor markets linking in with the town event programme.
66. The Towns Fund programme delivered improvements to the Yards, enhancements to Victoria Road, has supported the development of the RHQ, contributed to T-Levels facility at Darlington College and has supported businesses along North Road. The Council acquired the Northern Echo building, and a procurement process has begun to create space for an Adult Skills Hub and high quality office space.
67. Demand for office space is high and a feasibility study is underway for c25k sq. ft grade A office complex on the former Sports Direct site.
68. The Council continues to develop key economic sites at Central Park, Ingenium Parc and Faverdale to be investor ready. At Central Park, Innovation Central is open for business and securing tenants, the remaining plots are available to the market and a new access road has been installed. At Ingenium Parc phase 1 is complete with phase 2 due to start in

the summer. The first phase of Faverdale Business Park is fully let and further plots are for sale.

69. Housing delivery remains strong within the Borough despite ongoing challenges with Nutrient Neutrality. Housing completions have exceeded the annual local plan target despite not granting any significant new permissions. Building of 145 new Council houses on Neasham Road has commenced and a further 120 affordable homes identified in Phase 1 of Burtree Garden Village.
70. On Climate Change the Council is below the emission trajectory and developing an offsetting strategy to close the gap between current actions and carbon neutral.
71. TVCA is leading the delivery of the Bank Top Station project, with Darlington Council on the project board alongside TVCA, Department for Transport and LNER. The demolition phase of the Eastern side is near completion, the Cattlemarket temporary car park is operational and demolition complete on the former public house site. Discussions are continuing with TVCA on the remaining extent of the works for the Western Gateway.

## **Health and Housing**

72. Darlington Integrated Care Board (ICB) Place Sub Committee met for the second time in June. The ICB is required to produce a 5 year Joint Forward Plan. The Tees Valley Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) has taken forward work to inform the plan, which is based on the themes of 'Start Well', 'Live Well', 'Age Well'. A final draft of the Joint Forward Plan was considered by the ICB Board in June and will be published in September. The next step will be to develop a Plan for Darlington.
73. Work continued to help people across the Borough live long and healthy lives. In health and social care settings Covid 19 is now managed in the same way as any other respiratory infection and there is no longer regular reporting or monitoring of local case numbers. A new plan is being developed by the Director of Public Health with stakeholders to manage future public health risks and outbreaks in Darlington.
74. The public health team continued to progress a number of priorities:
  - (a) Implementing the Postvention programme with the NHS and voluntary sector to support those affected by suicide
  - (b) Expanding and rolling out the Making Every Contact Count training
  - (c) Delivered a Healthy Lifestyle Survey to 8,400 pupils in Darlington schools
  - (d) Agreed a long term plan with Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust to secure the development of the 0-19 Service
  - (e) Implementing partnership plans for Supplemental Substance Misuse and Recovery (SSMTR) to expand the number of treatment places for adults and young people

- (f) Implementing the Child Healthy Weight Plan to address high levels of excess weight in primary school children including a healthy school meals standard and training
  - (g) Re-establishment of a toothbrushing scheme to support children and staff to improve habits in cleaning teeth in targeted reception and primary schools. Commissioned a joined oral health needs assessment in conjunction with Tees Valley local authorities
  - (h) Continued delivery of the Council's commissioned Stop Smoking Service.
75. Despite the closure of the Dolphin Centre's main pool January 2022 for essential structural works business levels continue to be very positive. The annual total for visitor numbers is 851,822 which is around 232,000 higher than the previous year, and memberships are the highest they have been. The remaining pool complex has facilitated 1500 children weekly for their water education, along with lane swimmers, water-based fitness classes and limited family provision. DC Bowl and soft play are increasing their usage and the gym has expanded its service offer to GP referrals and a newly launched cancer rehabilitation service.
76. The provision of high quality council housing remained a priority and 100% of the social housing stock meets the current Decent Homes Standard. The new house build programme was significantly disrupted by Covid 19 with few properties completing in 2021/22, data is not available yet for this year but work has now concluded on Allington Way phase 3 and the foundations for 150 new homes at Neasham Road are underway. The service will continue to look for opportunities to build new affordable council properties.
77. Rent collection for Council housing remains high at 95.85% but has decreased slightly in Q4 compared to earlier quarters. Over 1,950 tenants are now in receipt of an element of Universal Credit and the average arrears for these customers remains under five weeks. The income team continue to promote help and guidance and making affordable payment plans.
78. There has been high demand for homelessness and housing advice services due to pressures in the housing market and cases are now open for longer due to challenges in finding alternative accommodation. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been refreshed and the Council was successful in a bid for additional Government funding to recruit additional staff to deliver support and advice services to homeless people, including for specialist mental health and domestic abuse.
79. The Lifeline service supports people to live in their own home, it is in demand with a steady increase in users throughout the year peaking in quarter four at 3,425 clients. There has been an increase in adult social care and health referrals over the last two quarters, and the service continues to work closely with social care, hospital discharge and reablement services.

## **Local Services**

80. The Council remained focused on delivering high quality services and events to meet the needs and expectations of a wide range of local people, ensuring the town centre is animated, vibrant and clean. The cleanliness of the town centre remains at a high

standard with latest inspection figures taken in October 2022 showing an 93% average pass rate for the year.

81. The Council continued to deliver an events programme to attract visitors to the town centre and bring footfall to retail and hospitality. Highlights include the Christmas Lights Switch On, ice sculpture trails, ice rink and Chinese New Year celebrations. The programme for 2023/24 season is now being confirmed.
82. Significant investment has been made in the Borough's cultural assets. Delivery continued on the Rail Heritage Quarter with Phase 1 commencing on site in May 2022 including the refurbishment of the 1861 rail shed and Phase Two commencing in February 2023 starting with the Goods Shed and Head of Steam.
83. Plans for the 2025 celebrations for the Stockton and Darlington Railway are progressing, a Festival Director has been appointed and the restoration of Loco No1 replica and wagon production making good progress.
84. The refurbishment of Crown Street Library will bring new technology and improvements to the service and building when it opens in September 2023. Delivery this year included repairs to the roof and structure of the building, upgrading mechanical and electrical installations as well as restoring the interior of the library. Cockerton Library services have remained open and have been thriving.
85. Modernisation work at Darlington Crematorium service is now complete. The new Chapel and burial ground are complete and opening early in 2023/24.
86. Key updates on work with Tees Valley Combined Authority on transport include the delivery of the Darlington Bank Top station rail project, entering into an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators, further development of walking and cycling schemes with work complete on Woodlands Road Phase 1 and underway on Duke Street, and installation of electric vehicles charging points in car parks.
87. Developments have been agreed at Teesside International Airport including planning approval granted for a Jet Centre and Aviation Village, a £25m investment with the potential to bring up to 300 jobs.

## **Resources**

88. This portfolio has focused on ensuring the Council is running efficiently and effectively, and is well governed in order to ensure a balanced budget. The economic climate presented new and significant financial challenges to the Council's budgets including rising inflation and interest rates, energy costs, post Covid rises in demand for social care and national living wage rises.
89. The overall amount of Council Tax collected by quarter 4 was £71.2m, the collection rate of 99% is on target to be met. Business rates collected by quarter 4 was £29.9m compared with £31.1m in 2021/22, the reason it is lower this year is due to the amount of rate relief awarded in 2022/23. Overall in year collection was 99.8%.
90. The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2023-27 was approved by Council in February

91. 2023 and provides a balance budget until 2025/26. Work is ongoing through the usual budget setting processes to identify how the budget will be brought into balance from 2026/27 onwards. The MTFP reflects the Local Government Finance settlement and includes council tax increases of 2.99% plus 2% Adult Social Care Precept (4.99% in total) for 2023/24.
92. The Council has invested in 6 joint ventures for housing building to date with all sites progressing well and on target to provide dividends. Three projects are completed with the investment repaid and dividends released. Three other joint ventures are ongoing: West Park, Elder Brook Park and the out of borough joint venture with Esh. The Council's £50m Investment Fund has £30.86m of regeneration and joint venture commitments against it. Further joint venture opportunities are being explored.
93. The Council has adopted a local wealth building approach to Council procurement and spend with Darlington-based suppliers has fluctuated around an average of 40% by up to 3% above and below over the last two years. There has been a slight decreased from the first and second quarters to 37%. The procurement team continue to engage with the local supply chain prior to any procurement activity.
94. The number of transactional services available via the corporate website has risen to 229 from 176 last year. There has been 34 additional online services go live in the last reporting period including taxi payment forms making it easier for taxi drivers to self-serve via the 'taxi-shop'.

### **Stronger Communities**

95. The Council is creating the conditions for safe and strong communities, often working in partnership with residents and other agencies to identify and address localised and borough-wide issues.
96. The Northgate Initiative has been progressed at mixed pace across the workstreams and a refresh of the programme is ongoing including developing a new data dashboard. A Community Hub was launched in March 2023 at Corporation Road School to provide residents with easy access to a range of support services.
97. The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT) now has 9 hubs in Darlington open across the working week, all located in areas identified as deprived. The number of customers has remained constant and over the year 14,279 bags of food have been distributed to Darlington families. TBBT also delivered Round 3 of the Household Support Fund through the distribution of fuel vouchers to residents and the provision of food to all foodbanks. This will continue into Round 4.
98. Darlington Cares continues to grow. It is a collaboration of 27 local employers that focuses and aligns their Corporate Social Responsibility activities. Most recent increases in membership is from suppliers to the Council enabling them to more easily deliver their social value commitments. Covid interrupted the delivery of employer supported volunteering but the programme is re-establishing rapidly. The 'Great Park Auction' held on 1 March 2023 saw local businesses commit 3,600 hours of volunteering to Darlington's Parks.

99. Number Forty opened in the town centre on 2 September 2022 as a safe space in the night time economy, located on Skinnergate and open on Friday and Saturday evenings (9pm and 3am) and has dealt with 334 incidents. The hub is staffed by two volunteers, Security Industry Authority door staff and two medics. 30 volunteers including 12 "Street Friends" patrol the night-time economy to support vulnerable people. Darlington has Purple Flag status for standards of excellence in managing the night-time economy and the Working Group is continuing its work on town centre improvements to support reaccreditation in October 2023.
100. Estimated unmet need for both alcohol and drug treatment are in decline and are lower than the England averages. Work is underway with partners to increase early identification and referral of hazardous drinkers to address the increase in the number of people seeking alcohol treatment. For drugs treatment work is underway to encourage treatment using Home Office funding to make services more accessible.
101. Town centre footfall follows a regular pattern c0.3m weekly footfall, but has taken a slight dip in recent months. The majority of business closures have attracted new replacement businesses, the Council is addressing the High Street Task Force report recommendations and the Towns Fund continued to invest in improvements.