

**CABINET
9 JANUARY 2024**

COUNCIL PLAN - QUARTER 2

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

Responsible Director - Chief Officers Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present an overview of performance to the end of the first two quarters of 2023/24.

Summary

2. The Performance report appended to this paper outlines council performance up to the end of quarter two of 2023/24 financial year, with the covering report highlighting key issues and successes.
3. The current Council Plan covers the period 2020-23. Work has commenced on the development of the new Council Plan which will outline long term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for the Council with a focus on addressing inequalities, climate change and efficient use of resources. It will be brought to a future meeting.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Cabinet consider delivery against performance measures as set out in the performance report in the Appendix.

Reasons

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

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

- This report highlights the current position on key measures for the 2020-2023 Council Plan. Each indicator has been updated with the latest information available at the end of quarter 2 of financial year 2023/24 and the information has been analysed. In some cases the data is collected externally and has not yet been updated so the analysis remains the same as the previous report. The appendix contains the detail for each indicator.
- It continues to be a challenging time for residents, communities and businesses with sustained rises in the costs of living affecting everyone, with the greatest impacts on those

with the lowest income. This continues to lead to increases in demand for Council services, more complex needs and pressures on workforce and budgets, in particular for the Childrens and Adults services.

8. Working collaboratively is a key principle of this administration and 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 including the Public Sector Executive Group, Voluntary and Community Sector, Health and Wellbeing Board, and in partnership with individual organisations, for example Tees Valley Combined Authority.
9. Work continues on the development of the new Council Plan which will cover the period 2024 to 2027 and focus on:
 - (a) A long-term vision and priorities for Darlington
 - (b) Addressing inequalities, climate change and resource efficiency
 - (c) A collaborative approach where we work with others to deliver shared outcomes

Key Issues

10. The first six months have seen some major announcements on Council priorities that focus on inequalities, climate change and resource efficiency:
 - (a) In July, the Council reaffirmed our declaration of a 'climate emergency' and agreed to bring forward the date by when Darlington Borough Council should become carbon neutral to at least 2040 (from 2050). The Council is now working to a 40% reduction in emissions every five years.
 - (b) Also in July, the Council agreed that being a care leaver or care experienced is now a locally recognised protected characteristic, providing new protections for young people who have spent time in care.
 - (c) The Council, like all other local authorities, is facing unavoidable financial pressures driven by insufficient funding, rising costs, and increasing demand for services, particularly in adult's and children's social care which accounts for two-thirds of our budget. In challenging financial circumstances, the Council has developed proposals for a balanced budget for 2024/25 in a new Medium Term Financial Plan which is now out for public consultation.
11. The performance data highlights some positive news:
 - (a) 89.2% of inspected mainstream schools in Darlington are judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. This is an increase from 75.7% in September 2022.
 - (b) The number of people employed, including self-employment continues to rise with a 7% growth between June 2022 and 2023.
 - (c) Unemployment as measured by the claimant count has levelled off at 4.3% for the working age population and 7.3% for 18-24 year olds, although it remains higher than North East and England averages.

- (d) The percentage of Council tax and business rates collected this year exceeds targets; and rents collected from Council tenants as a proportion of rents owed is 98.8%.
12. Work continues at pace across all portfolios to deliver a comprehensive set of programmes and services for residents and businesses and is detailed in the qualitative section of the indicators in the appendix.
13. There have also been some major projects delivered this year:
- (a) A new home for children has been registered with Ofsted and is fully functional. The children have moved into their new home and their former home has now been repurposed as a short breaks / emergency home, in line with service plans.
 - (b) Darlington's Holiday Activity Fund programme was further extended and delivered in communities across the Borough in Summer 2023. More than 1000 children engaged with 116 different programmes at 30 sites, 20% of these children had Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND).
 - (c) The refurbishment and restoration of Crown Street Library is complete with the building reopened to the public in September. Phase One of Hopetown (formerly known as the Rail Heritage Quarter) has delivered the new rail shed for A1 Steam Locomotive Trust and the refurbishment of the 1861 rail shed.
 - (d) The establishment of the joint venture with Esh at Hurworth Garden was approved by Cabinet in July with planning permission granted for the construction of 144 new houses.
 - (e) Darlington BEAT is a service funded by DBC and delivered by Citizen's Advice Darlington, in the first quarter of this year it supported residents over the age of 15 to claim over £360k.
14. The performance data appended to this report also highlights a number of challenges:
- (a) There continues to be increases in demand for Adults and Children's Services as seen in the 23.1% increase of children in our care (looked after children) compared to the end of September last year. Nationally there are difficulties with recruitment of foster care families and this remains a challenge in Darlington, the Council is continuing work to raise the profile of foster caring in Darlington.
 - (b) There are increases in the number of people with complex needs and the number of people admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care homes both in older people (aged 65+) and in adults aged 18-64. Capacity in the market continues to be a challenge and the Council is working to address this issue.
 - (c) The number of people presenting to the Council's homeless service remains high at 395 for July-September although this is a slight reduction compared to the previous two years. This is a challenging area compounded by the lifting of the ban on section 21 ("no fault" evictions) which continues to create increases in homelessness presentations. Despite this the average length of stay for each person in bed and

breakfast accommodation has decreased from 18 to 15 days over the last year through the proactive work of the housing options team.

- (d) The vibrancy of the High Street is an ongoing concern for all towns and cities. Footfall levels do vary year on year depending on a number of factors and there has been a decrease in footfall in five out of six months within this reporting period when compared to 2022. Factors include the challenge of rising inflation, the cost of living and the weather in summer 2022 being much better than this year. The Council continues to invest in the town centre through the Towns Fund and has put more events on this year than in the same period in 2022, to attract people into the town.
 - (e) Whilst recorded crime has seen an increase of 8% compared with the same period in the previous year, it should be noted the definition of crime has changed to include some activity previously reported as Anti Social Behaviour (ASB), which will contribute to the increase in crime numbers. The ASB indicator has seen a reduction of 23% in the same period. The Council is working in partnership to relaunch ShopWatch to tackle shoplifting and retail crime, and deployed trailblazer operations in hotspot areas to target crime and ASB.
15. The data also highlights long term challenges as demonstrated by public health indicators on healthy life expectancy. The healthy life expectancy for Darlington females and males at birth is lower than their national averages, and the latest data for 2020 shows inequality in life expectancy at birth for males and females has widened compared to previous years. The Council is currently developing a new Council Plan to be published in 2024 which will set out our long term ambitions for a strong inclusive economy where our communities thrive.