

Council Plan 2024-27

Draft For Consultation
6 March 2024



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Foreword

It is an honour to be Leader of Darlington Borough Council and to have the opportunity to share with you our draft Council Plan for 2024-2027. This plan sets out our long term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for the next few years. We want to hear your views.

Darlington is a great place to live and work. We are committed to making Darlington fairer and greener for everyone, building on opportunities and successes and facing up to the difficult challenges.

However, over the previous decade inequalities across our communities have worsened. The North East has seen the highest increase in child poverty over much of the previous decade. Child poverty restricts the chances for children to flourish. This is just a one example of inequalities that results in not everyone having the same life opportunities.

At the heart of the plan is our vision to be one of the best places in the UK to live, learn, work and invest - with a strong economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all.

This means Darlington will have an inclusive and sustainable economy; people living well and staying healthy; thriving places and connected communities. This is a long term vision and the beginning of our journey that we want to make together.

Three core values feed into this plan:

- **Addressing inequalities** - Darlington is a wonderful place to live and work and we want these opportunities to be accessible to everyone. We will develop a long term focus on understanding and addressing the causes of inequality ensuring our communities are safe and can thrive.
- **Tackling climate change** - the changing climate will impact all our lives. We will play our part by making the council carbon neutral by 2040 and working with others to deliver a more resilient Darlington.
- **Efficient and effective resources** - we will remain focussed on the financial sustainability of the council, ensuring good governance and delivering the best services possible with the resources we have for our residents, communities, and business.

The Council faces unparalleled financial challenges. Reductions in public spending between 2010 and 2019 meant the Council's budget was reduced by £46m in real terms, a 36% reduction in budget. After covid, we have seen the cost of living increasing, income deprivation and poverty rising, high inflation and interest rates along with a significant increase in demand for adult and children's services consuming over two thirds of our budget.

You will see the plan sets out six priorities for the Council for the next three years: economy, homes, living well, children and young people, communities and the environment.

This is ambitious and requires collaborative effort to deliver with existing partnerships such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, Public Sector Executive Group and Voluntary and Community Sector Executive Steering Group to new partnerships focussed on the economy.

The health, wealth and wellbeing of our residents is really important to us. At the heart of our Council Plan is a determination to have a focus on addressing inequalities. This can only be achieved by the Council working in partnership with our communities.

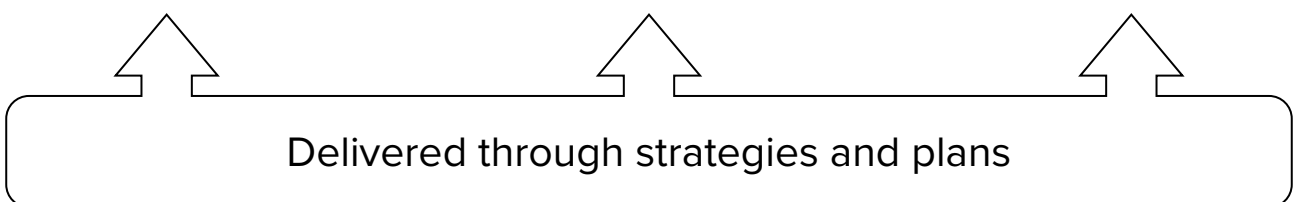
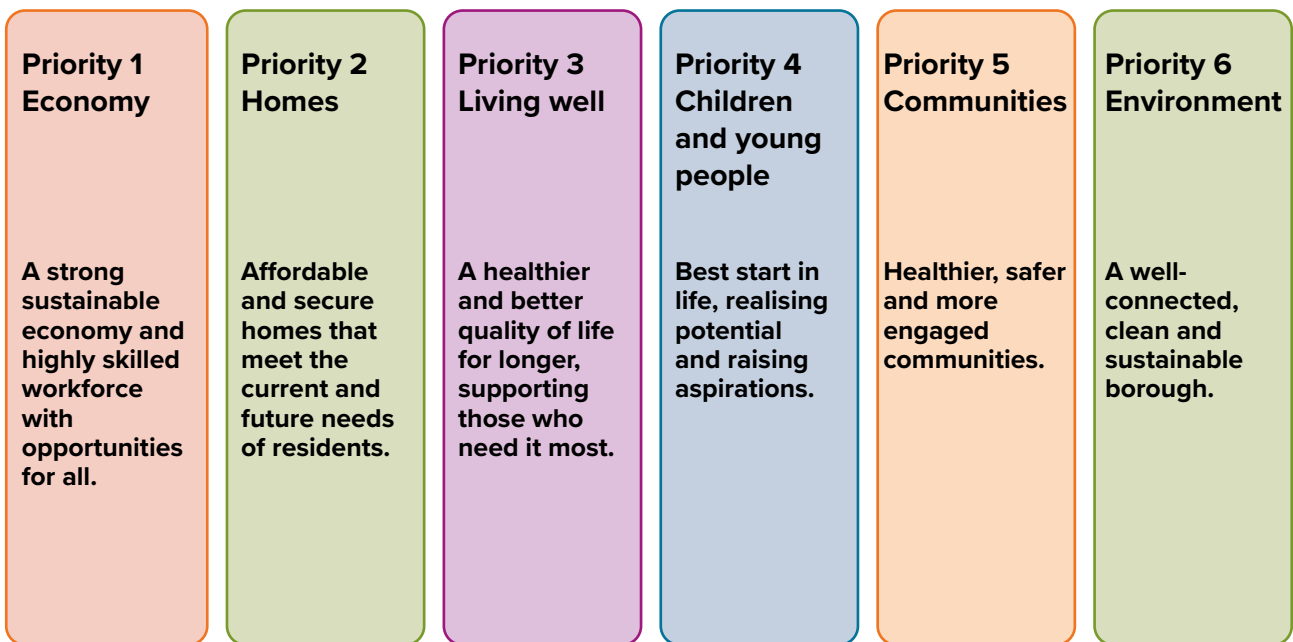
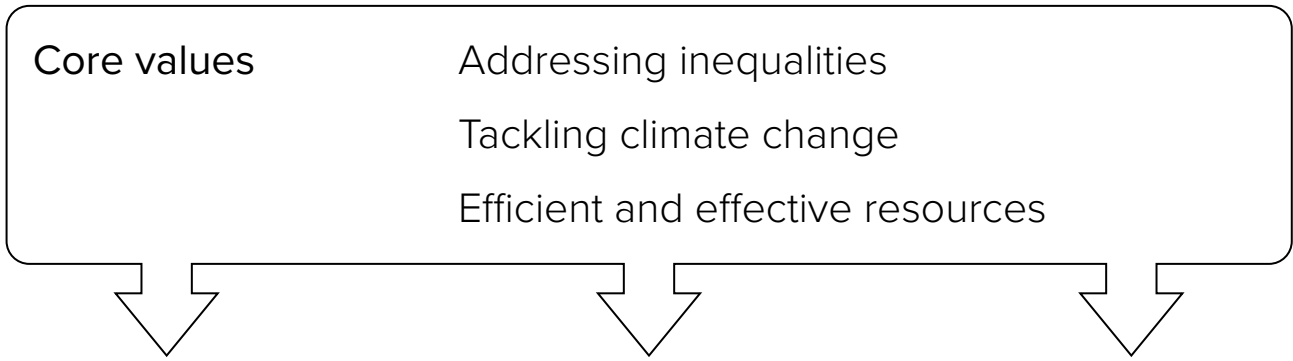
These are both exciting and challenging times for Darlington, and we want your views on our proposals in this plan to help shape our priorities and how we deliver.



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Our Plan For Darlington



What long term success looks like

An inclusive and sustainable economy will have:

- More people of all ages in good work
- Key sectors and sites innovating and growing by creating jobs, attracting more business and investment
- A healthy, productive and vibrant business community
- A business friendly public sector supporting businesses to locate and grow
- Increased skills levels in the resident labour market
- Vibrant town and neighbourhood centres providing services, retail and work for all generations
- A growing economy that supports our environment and heritage.

Living well and staying healthy will mean:

- Health outcomes are improved and inequalities reduced
- Children and young people have the best start in life
- People are supported to be independent
- Homes are affordable, healthy, secure and meet needs
- Households are more financially secure
- Residents live longer, healthier, more productive lives
- People are active and involved.

Thriving places and connected communities will have:

- Climate resilience where places are prepared for change and can adapt, with reduced CO₂ emissions
- Access to good services
- Happy, safe and secure communities with improved safety in public spaces
- Cultural, heritage and community assets
- Well-connected people and communities, with links to places within and outside the borough
- Digitally connected residents who are benefitting from opportunities offered online
- Attractive, relevant and welcoming places
- Sustainable and integrated transport across the borough and beyond.

Core values

We are committed to making Darlington a fairer and greener place for everyone. We are focussed on ensuring everyone has the opportunity for a good job, home and social connections. Our three core values are important principles we will consider in everything we do.

Addressing inequalities

Darlington is a wonderful place to live and work. We have a high quality of life and our economy is resilient and growing, but this is not felt by everybody. There are widening inequalities, and the gap between the people and places with the best and worst outcomes is unacceptably high. There are unacceptably high levels of child poverty and disadvantage, demonstrated by 25% of Darlington's children living in low income families, with the highest ward reaching nearly 47%. We want opportunities to be accessible to everyone. To achieve this will require a collaborative approach with our partners. We will:

- Develop a cross-council approach based on an in-depth understanding of inequalities and their causes, with a focus on local communities experiencing disadvantage
- Ensure all new strategies and plans consider inequalities, starting with the development of an inclusive growth strategy and a review of the health and wellbeing strategy
- Strengthen partnership working with key stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector with a long term focus on opportunity and addressing the causes of inequality; and short term focus on reducing the burden of the cost of living.

Tackling climate change

The climate is changing, which has an impact on our lives from the risk of flooding and more extreme weather to health impacts for our most vulnerable residents. We are also all facing increasing energy costs and potential threats to energy security. We cannot address these challenges alone, but we know we have an important role to play. One of the first things we did when we came to office was bring forward by 10 years the Council's commitment to being carbon neutral. We will:

- Deliver the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040
- Involve all parts of the council in a cross-council approach to sustainability and climate change
- Work alongside our business community collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero
- Work with partners, government, public and private sectors and residents for a resilient Darlington so we are able to respond and adapt to change.

Efficient and effective resources

The council is facing unparalleled financial challenges with rising costs and a significant increase in demand for services. We have a responsibility to ensure residents get value for money for their council tax and that every pound is spent efficiently and effectively. We will remain focussed on the financial sustainability of the council, ensuring good governance and delivering the best services possible with the resources we have for our residents, communities, and businesses. Our people are our best asset and will lead a culture of collaboration, innovation and creativity, and compassion, whilst maintaining focus on continuous improvement. We will:

- Deliver a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan and positive Value For Money outcome
- Deliver high quality governance and decision making
- Review and refresh the Asset Management Plan and Procurement Strategy
- Build on the Capital Project Management process by introducing an enhanced ICT system to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Review and deliver the workforce strategy
- Maximise income through new joint venture companies, increase levels of business rates by growing the local economy; and maximising grant opportunities
- Explore opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including online delivery
- Continue to build strong relationships with partners, residents and communities.

Key deliverables

Priority 1 - Economy

- Develop and deliver an inclusive economic growth strategy to create the conditions for businesses and the economy to thrive and provide good work opportunities for residents
- Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes
- Complete the refurbishment of the historic indoor market
- Accelerate bringing key sites to the market to attract private sector investment including Central Park, Ingenium Parc and Symmetry Park
- Deliver the Towns Fund projects, including the refurbishment of the Northern Echo building to secure new business occupiers
- Provide more education and skills opportunities for residents by delivering the Adult Skills Centre and collaborating with providers and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)
- Ensure that the borough is safe, clean and maintained to levels that support the economy and encourage inward investment
- Work with employers, national and local employability providers, and TVCA to promote good jobs and career opportunities for all, particularly young people and those with barriers to work, to access good employment outcomes.

Priority 2 - Homes

- Develop and deliver a new homes strategy to deliver current and future housing needs including social and affordable homes across the borough, in accordance with the Local Plan
- Review and refresh the preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, working with partners to ensure the provision of the right support and services to help people avoid homelessness and support those who are
- Review our approach to empty homes across the town so more quality homes are available
- Support the delivery of more social houses and supported accommodation by building more council homes and working with other social landlords and charities
- Continue to improve the quality of housing through healthy home design principles, ensuring developers meet the new Building Regulations requirements to create greater energy efficiency in new homes. Continue investment in the Council's existing and new housing stock to ensure greater energy efficiency
- Introduce additional licencing for homes of multiple occupation, a voluntary landlords charter and work towards the introduction of selective licencing in areas with a high number of private rented sector homes
- Ensure effective use of the Disabled Facilities Grant to enable people to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible.

Priority 3 - Living well

- Health and Wellbeing Board to agree and deliver a new strategy to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities, and lead the creation of a health and wellbeing network
- Develop and implement a new public health strategy, focussed on tackling health inequalities. Including developing strategies on domestic abuse, drugs, alcohol and physical activity
- Continue to develop joint working with the NHS and key partners to support people to lead healthier lives, stay in their homes for longer and reduce hospital stays
- Widen participation in recreation and leisure facilities including the Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex
- Shape a sustainable and accountable care market which delivers support focussed on promoting, regaining and maintaining people's independence and wellbeing
- Develop an Adult Social Care engagement strategy to ensure people requiring care and support, and their carers are involved in service development and commissioning activity
- Deliver the key aims of the adult social care transformation plan to prevent, reduce and/or delay the need for care by supporting people to manage their own independence and wellbeing.

Priority 4 - Children and young people

- Refresh and deliver the Children and Young People's Plan working with services across the council, key stakeholders in Darlington, and children and young people
- Develop more meaningful services by ensuring children and young people are involved in service development and commissioning activity
- Work with the Department for Education and the successful academy trust sponsor to ensure the free school for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is developed on schedule providing vital additional specialist capacity in Darlington
- Continue the successful management of the Safety Valve plan to improve outcomes for young people with SEND, eliminate the historic deficit on funding and deliver a financially sustainable system
- Work with multi-academy trusts and schools to develop a high quality and inclusive education sector in Darlington
- Widen access for children in receipt of benefits related school meals to the Holiday Activities and Food Programme with a focus on health, wellbeing and raising aspirations
- Work in partnership with the early years sector and health services to promote school readiness and the delivery of the expansion of funded childcare entitlement
- Increase the number of local in-house placements for looked after children who are cared for by the council.

Priority 5 - Communities

- Support and strengthen partnership working with voluntary and community groups with a focus on addressing the causes of inequality, financial inclusion, social exclusion, and vulnerable families with children and young people
- Work with partners to reduce the burden of the cost of living with a focus on food and fuel insecurity
- Work with the voluntary and community sector to develop a strategy for informal volunteering which empowers people to volunteer and directs volunteering to areas of greatest need, including working with Darlington Cares to deliver an enhanced volunteering programme
- Support communities to remain safe and resilient by working with key agencies and communities to address anti social behaviour and crime issues in the community
- Support a strong Community Safety Partnership to ensure the issues affecting the safety and security of our communities are addressed collectively, including addressing hate crime
- Ensuring business activity is regulated, licensed and enforced effectively to protect the health and wellbeing of residents, visitors and businesses.

Priority 6 - Environment

- Celebrate the opening of Hopetown and deliver a successful 2025 festival programme that helps to promote Darlington as a destination for visitors and investment
- Work with local stakeholders and businesses to promote a diverse and accessible programme of events that maximises footfall in the town centre and has a positive impact on the local economy
- Deliver revised supplementary planning documents that guide better design in new developments and contribute to a sense of pride in place
- Enable improvements in transport systems by working in partnership with TVCA and public transport operators to deliver the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme, including the improvement of bus facilities and the reliability of services
- Introduce food waste collections and encourage residents to increase overall recycling rates to move towards the national average
- Work with statutory bodies to progress studies of flood risk in Darlington and enable funding to be sought to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Monitoring the plan

Progress in delivering the plan will be regularly reported to Cabinet. It is anticipated this will include a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators that demonstrate progress against the long-term ambitions, priorities and deliverables. Some long-term indicators, which we know will take time to move, are likely to be included.

The Council Plan performance report will be supplemented annually by the Darlington Profile report that analyses the most up to date published data and intelligence, and feedback from surveys.

Have your say

We want to support the Borough to be the best it can be and have set out our long term ambitions and short term actions for you to review and have your say. This consultation is the beginning of a conversation with you on the future of Darlington and our priorities.

We want to know what you think of the plan and what is most important to you.

Follow the link below or scan the QR code to complete the short survey:



<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/consultations/>

The survey is open from 6 March 2024 and closes on 25 April 2024.

Printed copies of the plan are available to view and comment on at Darlington Library, Cockerton Library and the Dolphin Centre. Please email **strategy@darlington.gov.uk** if you would like a copy of the draft Council Plan in an alternative format.



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