

**CABINET**  
**16 JULY 2024**

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**COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2023: QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader 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 performance to the end of the last two quarters of financial year 2023/24.

**Summary**

2. This is the final report linked to the Council Plan 2020-2023. The report appended to this paper outlines council performance up to the end of quarter four of financial year 2023/24, with this covering report highlighting key issues and successes.
3. A new Council Plan for the period 2024-2027 is to be considered by Council in July 2024. It proposes long term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for the Council, with a focus on addressing inequalities, climate change and efficient use of resources. A performance report will be presented to Cabinet on a six-monthly basis to report progress on a new set of deliverables.

**Recommendation**

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

**Reason**

5. The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the progress in implementing the priorities outlined in the Council Plan 2020-23.

**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 and 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

6. 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 4 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.
7. As reported in January 2024, it continues to be a challenging time for residents, communities and businesses with sustained rises in the costs of living affecting everyone, and 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. The performance report highlights positive news:
  - (a) The economy continues to show signs of recovery and growth:
    - (i) The number of people employed (including self-employed) is 53,000 - an increase of 2,000 on the same time 12 months previously.
    - (ii) Unemployment as measured by the claimant count has levelled off at 4.2% for the working age population, this is lower than the North East average at 7.3%.
    - (iii) Darlington hosted major events including Darlington Jobs Fair and STEMfest and progress to develop key economic sites to be investor ready continues to be strong.
  - (b) Tax and rate collection remains high:
    - (i) The percentage of Business Rates collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 99.97% of Business Rates collected, compared to 99.79% in quarter 4 of 2022-23.
    - (ii) The percentage of Council Tax collected exceeded the target for quarter 4, with 96.39% of Council Tax collected in 2023-24, the highest since 2010/11. This is an increase in collection, compared to 2022-23, which was 96.09%.
  - (c) 89.2% of inspected mainstream schools in Darlington are judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. The annual increase in Ofsted rating was 9.99%.
  - (d) There has been a reduction of children in our care (looked after children) of 6.8% compared to the end of March 2023, with 300 children in our care. This is an improvement from Q1 and Q2 where levels were at their highest peak since measurement of this indicator began.
  - (e) Work continues to keep the borough clean and safe:

- (i) The cleanliness of the Borough in relation to litter identified by the land audit management system has seen an improvement over the last year.
  - (ii) The number of people slightly injured in road traffic collisions has fell significantly when compared to the long-term trend and partnership working to reduce fatal and serious continues to try and drive down these incidents down further.
- (f) The number of volunteering hours delivered by the corporate membership of Darlington Cares has increased by 50.9% from 6,776 in 2022/23 to 10,277 in 2023/2024.
9. Key challenges highlighted by the report:
- (a) 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. Following a public consultation the MTFP for 2024-2028 was approved by Council in February 2024, providing a balanced budget until 2025/26.
  - (b) The number of people presenting to the Council's homeless service remains high at 1,393. However, the number of presentations to the Housing Options Service has reduced by 31.9% compared with the previous year. Additional staffing, funded through The Rough Sleeper Initiative, for the Housing Options Team, has enabled a dedicated rough sleeper co-ordinator, navigator, and outreach worker, to be embedded within the team, delivering effective early intervention and prevention.
  - (c) There continues to be an increase in the number of adults and older people (aged 65+) admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care. Capacity in the market continues to be a challenge and the Council is working to address this issue.
  - (d) There has been a drop in housing delivery this year primarily due to the impact of the nutrient neutrality designation affecting the whole of the Tees Valley catchment. Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England Nutrient Neutrality credits scheme which has helped to unlock around 2000 homes.
  - (e) The vibrancy of the High Street is an ongoing concern for all towns and cities. The Town Centre average monthly footfall for 2023/24 has fallen 5.5% to 237,731 from 286,938 (2022/23). Footfall levels vary year on year depending on factors including rising inflation and the cost of living. Investment from the Towns Fund is ongoing to support the High Street, a comprehensive programme of 59 events and animation programmes were delivered throughout the year to attract people to the borough. The Council was also awarded Purple Flag accreditation in January 2024.
10. The data also highlights long term challenges that have not changed since the previous report, for example the 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. Work is underway to better understand the causes of this as part of the work with partners to develop a new Health and Wellbeing strategy for the Borough.

### **The Council Plan 2024-2027**

11. Work continues on the development of the new Council Plan which has been out to public consultation and will be presented to Cabinet in July for consideration and approval. It will set out a long-term vision for Darlington and focus on addressing inequalities, climate change and resource efficiency; and key deliverables for action within the reporting period of the Council Plan.
12. It is intended that a performance report will be presented to Cabinet on a six-monthly basis to report progress on a new set of deliverables.