

**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
5 SEPTEMBER 2024**

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QTR 4 2023/24

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2023/24 at Quarter 4.

Background

2. This report provides performance information in line with an indicator set and scrutiny committee distribution agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently by scrutiny committee chairs.
3. The indicators included in this report are aligned with key priorities. Other indicators may be referenced when appropriate in narrative provided by the relevant assistant directors, when providing the committee with performance updates.
4. 22 indicators are reported to the committee, 18 of them are updated on a six-monthly basis and all 22 annually.
5. One indicator is reported by Culture, three by Planning, five by Economic Growth, two by Human Resources, one by Health & Safety, two by Complaints & Information Governance, four by Housing, one by Legal, and three by Environmental Health.

2022/23 comparison to 2023/24

Culture

6. The weekly average footfall in the town centre decreased (CUL 080a – 251,691 to 237,731). A comprehensive programme of 59 events were delivered throughout the year to attract people to the town. A marketing campaign with video was released to attract new businesses, getting 30,000 views. The redevelopment of the covered market is well advanced. Occupancy rates in the town centre is currently at 88%. Investment from the Towns Fund is ongoing to support the High Street.

Planning

7. The percentage of major planning applications decided within 13 weeks or within an agreed time decreased (ECI 104 – 89.5% to 84.6%). 11 of the 13 applications were decided within the target time. The two that did not meet the deadline were delayed by the Extension of Time date not being extended to cover the signing of S106 agreements.

8. The percentage of non-major planning developments decided within 13 weeks or within agreed time increased (ECI 105 – 92.4% to 96.6%). There were 345 decisions issued for the 357 applications received. The most frequent reason for cause of delay was the Nutrient Neutrality Certification. All 12 of the decisions that did not meet the deadline were decided within 26 weeks.
9. The percentage of non-major planning developments decided within 13 weeks or within agreed time over the last 24 months increased (ECI 106 – 91.8% to 94.4%). There were 752 decisions issued for the 710 applications received. The most frequent reasons for cause of delay are the Nutrient Neutrality Certification and missing of Extension of Time targets. Darlington percentage is above both the latest North East and England averages.

Economic Growth

10. The monthly unemployment claimant count percentage decreased (ECI 321 - 4.3% to 4.2%). It has remained relatively static since April 2022. This trend is mirrored in both regional and national statistics. Darlington's rate is marginally higher than England (4.1%) and lower than North East (4.7%).
11. The economically active rate increased (ECI 327 – 80.3% to 84.6%), better than the North East (74.6%) and England (78.8%) average. Working age economically inactive people have various reasons for not looking for and/or being able to start work, e.g., students, sickness, caring and family responsibilities and early retirement.
12. The average (median) annual income for Darlington residents increased (ECI 329 - £25,811 to £27,282), above the North East (£26,952) but below the England (£29,919) averages. Annual income increased by 5.7%, a rate that is lower than the England and North East rates of 6.8% and 6.7% respectively.
13. The average (median) annual income for Darlington employees increased (ECI 329 - £25,155 to £26,509), below the North East (£26,576) and England (£29,995) averages. This represents 4 years in a row of year-on-year increases. Residents of Darlington have a higher average income than those employees who work in the borough.
14. The number of new homes delivered within the year decreased (ECI 401 - 516 to 359). Housing delivery has seen a drop in the 2023/24 financial year largely due to the delayed 'lag' effect as a result of the Nutrient Neutrality designation affecting the whole Tees Catchment. Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England Nutrient Neutrality credits scheme in which the borough fared well in the proportion of credits allocated.

Human Resources

15. The number of working days per full-time equivalent (FTE) lost due to sickness by Council employed staff decreased in 2023/24 (FHR 001 – 9.6 to 9.3), an improvement of 0.29 days on 2022/23. Managers at all levels continue to manage sickness within their teams, using the Council's sickness management policies, supported by Human Resources officers. The Wellbeing programme continues to produce benefits to the

workforce and the Council as a whole, with further development and events planned for 2024/25.

16. The percentage of voluntary leavers decreased in 2023/24 (FHR 019 – 10.0% to 8.3%). Exit surveys and interviews are carried out to help understand why employees leave the Council and to inform on improvements. 85% of employees who completed an exit survey said they would work for the Council again. Work has been completed on personal development reviews with the Council rolling out the new "My Journey process", incorporating succession planning and further promotion of employee engagement. We continue to develop and improve our employment package to ensure the Council attracts and retains the best talent for all roles.

Health and Safety Indicators

17. The number of reportable employee accidents / ill health to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) under the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations decreased in 2023/24 (FHR 003 - 15 to 11). All accidents and ill health reports are investigated by management and the Health & Safety team to establish the causes, to identify issues or trends and make recommendations to prevent reoccurrence. Health and Safety is a key priority for the Council at all levels and is promoted through all working practices.

Complaints and Information Governance Indicators

18. The number of complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman increased (FHR 008 - 6 to 10). The eight complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman related to the following service areas, Adult Services (1), Children Services (2), Commissioning & Contracts (2), Education and Inclusion (2) and Finance (1). The one complaint upheld by the Housing Ombudsman related to Housing Management Services (1) and Income Management (1).
19. The number of complaints upheld by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) increased (FHR 009 - 6 to 9). Five of the nine upheld complaints related to delays in responding to Subject Access Requests (SARs). Risk of enforcement action from the ICO in relation to SARs remains on the Council's Risk Register and work is ongoing to reduce that risk below the risk appetite line. The other four were for, retaining a former employee's data for longer than retention period, data breaches (2), and delay of an e-mail response to an FOI request.

Housing and Revenues Indicators

20. The amount of Council Tax arrears collected decreased (HBS 002 - £1,971,156 to £1,880,721) but exceeded the target for the year. The higher amount collected last year was due to the restarting of recovery action of arrears following the Covid pandemic. This recovery action is ongoing. The amount of outstanding arrears decreased from £4.3 million to £4.2million over the last financial year, even with the current cost of living pressures.

21. The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered decreased (HBS 003 - £635,633 to £543,542), falling below the target for the year. Collection rates are currently at 126% of the new overpayment debt created (£431k), and the overall outstanding debt has decreased (currently at £1.34 million). It is likely that as Housing Benefit claims continue to transfer to Universal Credit, the amount of Housing Benefit overpayments created (and therefore the amount collected) will decrease.
22. The percentage of Council Tax collected in-year has increased (HBS 009 – 96.1% to 96.4%), exceeding the target for the year. The collection rate of 96.39% is the highest it has been since 2010-11 and is above both the North-East average (94.93%) and the England average (95.94%). The overall amount collected in 2023/24 was £72.5 million compared to £68.4 million last year.
23. The percentage of Business Rates collected in-year increased (HBS 010 – 99.79% to 99.97%), exceeding the target for the year and is the highest collection rate in the North-East (average of 97.78%) and the fourth highest in England (average 97.23%). The overall amount collected in 2023/24 was £31.2 million compared to £31.8 million last year.

Legal

24. The percentage of contracted spend as a percentage of total non-salary spend increased (LGP 008 – 83.9% to 80.0%). The continued engagement with departments through communication announcements and checking of spend against the Contracts Register on a regular basis have helped officers with their understanding of the authority procurement procedure.

Environmental Health

25. The percentage of food premises which are inspected within the year in which they are due increased (REG 301 – 65.8% to 96.6%). Following the pandemic officers have been engaged in a Post Covid Recovery Plan. All inspections were triaged in terms of risk and inspected accordingly. The backlog of 1,000 inspections has been cleared and overdue inspections completed by the food safety team using a range of resources, including out of hours inspections and contract inspectors to carry out this work.
26. The percentage of premises broadly compliant for food hygiene increased (REG 308 – 99.0% to 99.2%). The consistent high level of compliance is due to a robust, consistent, and proportionate advice, inspection, and enforcement regime by officers.
27. The percentage noise complaints investigated and completed within 6 weeks of the date of receipt increased (REG 312a – 96.8% to 97.8%). The 90% target continues to be achieved even though the number of complaints has increased. There were 911 complaints in 2023/24, 347 relating to barking dogs, 366 other types of domestic noise and 81 about commercial and industrial premises.

Performance Summary

28. All 22 indicators had Quarter 4 data to report.
29. When taking into consideration what is best performance for each indicator:
- a) 15 of the 22 indicators have increased when compared to the previous year.
 - b) 7 of the 18 indicators have decreased when compared to the previous year.
30. A detailed performance scorecard is attached at Appendix 1.
31. Detailed performance and narratives for each indicator is attached at Appendix 2.

Recommendation

32. It is recommended that performance information provided in this report is reviewed and noted, and relevant queries raised with appropriate Assistant Directors.

Ian Thompson
Assistant Director – Community Services
Mark Ladyman
Assistant Director – Economic Growth
Luke Swinhoe
Assistant Director – Law and Governance
Anthony Sandys
Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues
Brett Nielsen
Assistant Director – Resources

Background Papers

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

Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key priorities ECONOMY - building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all. HOMES – affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents
Addressing inequalities	This report supports the promotion of diversity There are no specific indicators on inequalities contained within this report

Tackling Climate Change	<p>There are no specific carbon impact issues in this report.</p> <p>There are no specific indicators on climate change contained within this report</p>
Efficient and effective use of resources	<p>Scrutiny of performance is integral to optimising outcomes.</p> <p>This report has no impact on the Council's Efficiency Programme.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	<p>This report supports performance improvement relating to improving the health and wellbeing of residents</p>
S17 Crime and Disorder	<p>This report supports the Councils Crime and Disorder responsibilities</p>
Wards Affected	<p>This report supports performance improvement across all Wards</p>
Groups Affected	<p>This report supports performance improvement which benefits all groups</p>
Budget and Policy Framework	<p>This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework</p>
Key Decision	<p>This is not a key decision</p>
Urgent Decision	<p>This is not an urgent decision</p>
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	<p>This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers</p>