

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26 August 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Anderson (Chair), Donoghue, Layton, Mammolotti, M Nicholson and Tostevin

APOLOGIES – Councillors Crumbie, Renton and Storr.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Joss Harbron (Assistant Director - Adult Social Care), James McAllister (Democratic Officer) and Sukhdev Dosanjh (Head of Commissioning and Contracts)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Toms.

AD7 INTRODUCTIONS/ATTENDANCE AT MEETING

AD8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AD9 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 10 JUNE 2025

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 10 June 2025, be approved as a correct record.

AD10 CQC ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK UPDATE

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, submitted a report (previously circulated) to update and inform Members on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance framework and inspection activity. Following an informal update on the inspection at the last meeting of this Scrutiny Committee, this served as a formal report on the findings of the inspection.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, first outlined the CQC's inspection process, detailing how this is the framework by which Local Authorities are assessed in accordance with the care act. The final report was received from the CQC on the 30th May 2025, with an overall score of 73%, which provided Darlington Borough Council with an official 'GOOD' score. The score was received alongside commentary from the inspecting officer and comments from key stakeholders.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, informed the Committee that the 73% score places the Council as one of the highest rated adult services in the country, a testament to the hard work, commitment and dedication of the adult service teams and wider colleagues who have worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care referred to the nine different quality statements by which the Council was assessed. The Council received 'good' in eight of the nine quality statements, with a Requires Improvement for Equity in Experience and Outcomes.

Members posed questions regarding the area which required improvement, specifically regarding whether this was something the team was expecting, to which The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, answered stating that this was something they were conscious of as other Local Authorities had received similar scores. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, affirmed to Members that the score was close to 'Good', but are actively trying to improve this.

Members also questioned regarding the 60-day turnaround for Occupational Health as to whether the team were agile enough to meet this time scale, to which The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, confirmed of the team's proven success in doing so.

Members concluded this area of discussion by congratulating the Adult Services team for their ongoing hard work, ability to respond to feedback, and fantastic result.

AD11 ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES COMMISSIONED FROM OUT OF AREA

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts introduced a report (previously circulated) which provided this Scrutiny Committee with an overview of current Out of Area (OOA) placements in residential, nursing or respite care. At the request of the Chair, this report also included reference to Day Opportunities and the reasons such placements have been made.

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts provided the Committee with the Association for Directors of Adult Social Services' (ADASS) definition of "Out of Area", and informed Members of the number of individuals placed outside the Darlington Borough. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts reminded Members that whilst such placements are OOA, 44% of these placements are within 0-20 miles of Darlington's Boundary, reinforcing Adult Services' ability to monitor individuals placed OOA.

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts went on to inform the Committee of the reasons for which the Council would secure placements OOA and provided an in-depth breakdown of what type of OOA establishments the Council utilises in both a short break and longer-term basis. The Head of Commissioning and Contracts also provided the Committee with further demographical context for those receiving care OOA.

The Head of Commissioning and Contracts asked the committee to note Key areas for Development in the context of OOA placements and therefore informed the Committee of such areas. Such areas included Day Opportunities, SEND Educational Providers, Skills for Life, health and Commissioning. It was also stated that Adult Social Services are to develop a local personalised learning college in Darlington for September 2026.

Members posed questions to The Head of Commissioning and Contracts regarding how Adult services ensure that Darlington residents placed OOA do not disrupt neighbouring local communities. Both The Head of Commissioning and Contracts and the Assistant Director, Adult Services, responded stating that the standard practice is to communicate with the Local Authorities that Darlington residents placed OOA are placed within, and receive continuous oversight over the care they receive.

AD12 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS END OF YEAR 2024/2025

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2024/2025.

The report referred to the performance of 10 of the 12 indicators reported at the end of the year 2024/2025, with one indicator showing performance has improved in comparison to the same period last year, two performance indicators being comparable with the same time last year, four performance indicators lower than the same time last year, and three indicators being not comparable and are reviewed at a point in time. Due to recent ASCOF /CLD (Client Level Data) changes there are two indicators that are no longer being reported on. The new indicators which are to be replaced are currently under development, and therefore figures were not able to be produced for this meeting of the Adults Scrutiny Committee.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, provided commentary over the aforementioned figures, and informed the Committee that the service area is currently facing significant demand as a result of people being discharged from hospital, placed temporarily in adult social care, and becoming permanent recipients as an eventuality. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, assured Members that the use of “permanent” here is not final, and individual cases are being reviewed constantly. Members were informed that the aim going forward is to encourage reablement and allow individuals to receive care from their homes.

Members posed questions on the KPI’s that weren’t performing as well as last year, specifically on Self Directive Support and how the Council can guide people into up taking this service. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, answered noting that Self Directive Support allows individuals to have ownership over their own care and thus have reviewed the direct payment procedure to ensure transparency with recipients over what the service is. Following this, the procedure has been adjusted to be much more transparent, and additionally it has become mandatory for all social workers to pose this as an option during consultations.

AD13 WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Assistant Director, Law and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited Members to consider the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

The Democratic Officer spoke to this report and invited Members and Officers into discussion over rescheduling certain items as a result of a previous item being deferred. The purpose of this was to ensure that items receive the appropriate time to be scrutinised effectively and successfully. As a result, Members and Officers agreed to move the Domestic Abuse Strategy (update) from the January Meeting of the Adults Scrutiny Committee to the October date, in order to allow the Medium Term Financial Plan item to receive sufficient time to be scrutinised in January.

AD14 SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (IF ANY) WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR OF THIS COMMITTEE ARE OF AN URGENT NATURE AND CAN BE DISCUSSED AT THIS MEETING.

Following the Chairs request during the pre-briefing for this Scrutiny Committee meeting, The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, delivered an informal update on the Blue Badge Process as a result of its inclusion in the Forward Plan.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, alluded to the new Governmental Criteria for Blue Badges and how this has affected application volume and re-applications for existing Blue Badges. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, noted that the distribution of Blue Badges falls jointly between Adult Social Care and Customer Services, and that a new procedure has been put in place to combat the backlog of applications.

The new procedure ensures that the application processing has been spread across the Occupational Therapy Team, rather than falling to one member of staff. Additionally, there is now no requirement for a meeting with Occupational Therapy if one's condition automatically warrants a Blue Badge.

As a result of the new procedures and criteria, waiting times have been reduced from 16 weeks to 5 weeks (from the start to end of the process) and has hugely reduced the current number of individuals waiting for a Blue Badge.

Members welcomed this and commented on the huge relief this has provided to residents.

AD15 QUESTIONS

There were no further questions posed at this Meeting.