

**CABINET
2 DECEMBER 2025**

PRIDE IN PLACE

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Jim Garner, Stronger Communities Portfolio**

**Trevor Watson
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - (a) Provide the background to the Pride in Place programme
 - (b) Outline the current position of the fund in Darlington
 - (c) Outline the Council's governance arrangements
 - (d) Present the Regeneration Plan submitted to MHCLG for approval

Summary

2. Darlington is part of the Government's Pride in Place programme which will invest £19,539,000 in Darlington over the next ten years.
3. To manage the fund an independent Neighbourhood Board has been established to which the Council acts as secretariat and accountable body. Council officers attend meetings and advise the Board. Staffing arrangements have been revised to support the delivery of the fund objectives.
4. Project management capability is being provided by the Council. The Council's procurement team ensures the procurement route is correct. Appropriate Governance arrangements are in place detailed below.
5. A Regeneration Plan (attached) has been submitted the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that: -
- (a) The Regeneration Plan is endorsed
 - (b) The governance and programme delivery arrangements are agreed

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -
- (a) The Pride in Place programme represents an investment of £19,539,000 in Darlington over the next ten years.
 - (b) The programme in development directly supports the ambitions of the Council Plan

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Background Papers

In preparation of this report the following papers were used:

- (a) Darlington Neighbourhoods Board minutes
- (b) Plan for Neighbourhoods Prospectus and Guidance

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Council Plan	The programme directly supports the delivery of the Council Plan.
Addressing inequalities	It directly aims to address inequality, particularly in the most deprived wards of Darlington.
Tackling Climate Change	N/A
Efficient and effective use of resources	The Pride in Place is a government grant which complements Council resources.
Health and Wellbeing	The programme in development aims to improve health and wellbeing.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The programme in development addresses crime and anti-social behaviour.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All (particularly those in the more deprived wards)
Budget and Policy Framework	The Pride in Place is a government grant which complements Council resources.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No

Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	N/A
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MAIN REPORT

Background

Plan for Neighbourhoods

- 8. The Plan for Neighbourhoods is an initiative launched by the UK Government in March 2025, aimed at revitalising communities that have faced long-term challenges. Darlington was selected as one of 75 areas across the UK to benefit from this programme, securing up to £20 million in funding over the next ten years.
- 9. The programme is designed to:
 - (a) **Build Thriving Places** – investing in infrastructure, public spaces, and local services to improve quality of life.
 - (b) **Strengthen Communities** – fostering social cohesion and resilience through inclusive engagement.
 - (c) **Empower People** – enabling residents to shape the future of their neighbourhoods through active participation.
- 10. The initiative is based on three overriding principles:
 - (a) Development of projects will be devolved to grassroots
 - (b) It is a long-term plan (ten years) therefore can adjust to meet changes in demand
 - (c) The access to funding is flexible and light touch
- 11. The intention is that interventions are ‘community developed’. Voluntary and Community sector partners could/should play a significant role in delivering the programme.
- 12. The Government launched its Pride in Place Programme in September 2025 which is a £5 billion, ten-year investment targeting up to 250 of the UK’s most deprived and socially disconnected neighbourhoods. Each area receives up to £20 million, with decisions made by Neighbourhood Boards composed of residents, local businesses, and community organisations.
- 13. The Strategic Goals are to:
 - (a) Restore Civic Pride: Rebuild trust in public institutions and foster a sense of belonging.
 - (b) Strengthen Social Capital: Improve wellbeing, reduce crime, and boost economic productivity through stronger community ties.

(c) Tackle Inequality: Address disparities in health, income, and access to services

14. As the other initiatives around the country, Darlington's Plan for Neighbourhoods now becomes part of the Pride in Place programme. However, other than a name change (which is optional) there is no change to the prospectus or guidance.

Plan for Neighbourhoods (Pride in Place) – Darlington

15. A Neighbourhood Board has been established to lead the initiative locally. This board includes residents, businesses, strategic partners, and stakeholders, and is chaired independently to ensure transparency and community representation. The Board is responsible for developing a ten-year regeneration plan (**Appendix 1**), supported by a detailed four-year investment plan (currently in development), which will guide the allocation of resources and delivery of projects.
16. The initiative aligns with Darlington's Council Plan goals of addressing inequality, improving health and wellbeing, and enhancing public safety. It also complements the aims to make efficient use of resources while having engaged the Voluntary and Community Sector to ensure robust community involvement.

Current Position

17. The Neighbourhood Board has agreed a vision as follows:

"To foster connected, inclusive, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods across Darlington that celebrate local identity, support community wellbeing, and can adapt to the evolving needs of residents, ensuring every neighbourhood is a great place to live, work, and thrive."

18. Which will be delivered via two objectives:

(a) Driving Growth

(b) Thriving Neighbourhoods

19. The Board commissioned the voluntary and community sector to carry out a community engagement exercise which generated 2,398 responses, significantly more than any similar exercise in Darlington, providing a sound evidence base for the programme.

20. An in-depth analysis of data related to the following has been undertaken:

(a) Population

(b) Economy

(c) Homes

(d) Living Well

(e) Children and Young People

(f) Place and infrastructure

21. This has led to a recognition that the communities most left behind are around:

(a) Branksome

(b) Northgate

(c) Red Hall

(d) Skerne Park

(e) Bank Top

22. However, whilst it was recognised that the issues of concern were concentrated in the following neighbourhoods, they could not be bounded by a firm line.

23. The intention is that there will be an equitable distribution of resources across these areas.

Project Development

24. A feasibility study for a STEM centre has been commissioned which would be a central element of the Driving Growth objective. The intention is to establish routes into quality jobs for people, particularly youths from 'left behind' neighbourhoods

25. A feasibility study is at the assessment stage for engaging residents in planning the redesign of the Skerne Park Community Centre.

26. A programme addressing the needs of disabled people by creating a network of step free routes across the town is in development.

27. The newly formed Youth Partnership is developing a 'capacity building' proposal which would revolve around outreach youth work in the target neighbourhoods that would help inform future provision.

Financial Implications

28. The fund will be managed in line with the Council's existing financial management controls.

29. The direct costs of management and delivery are recovered from the fund to minimise the cost to the Council.

30. As capital projects are developed consideration is given to all future revenue costs associated with the proposals to limit any financial liability to the Council.

31. The grant is provided as follows:

Funding	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	30/31	31/32	32/33	33/34	34/35	35/36	Total
CapacityBuilding	450	150										600
Revenue		232	256	432	432	432	432	437	450	450	450	4,003
Capital		360	1,736	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	14,936
Total	0	592	1,992	2,037	2,037	2,037	2,037	2,042	2,055	2,055	2,055	19,539

32. This year, 2025/26, is described as 'Year Zero'. Capacity building funds of £450,000 have been provided to enable Neighbourhood Boards to embed the necessary governance structures, build local capacity and capability and to ensuring capital and infrastructure interventions can hit the ground running. Capacity building funds can be carried forward into future years and a further £150,000 of capacity building funds will be provided next year.

33. To date £122,267 of capacity building funds have been spent on a feasibility study into a Science Technology Engineering and Maths learning facility and on a community engagement exercise.

Governance

34. It is incumbent on the Neighbourhood Board and local authority to ensure that the appropriate capacity and capability is in place throughout the programme period to ensure that funds are distributed effectively in the local area.

35. In line with the guidance Darlington Neighbourhood Board acts as the main decision-making body.

36. Darlington Borough Council, as the accountable body for the programme, is required to ensure that all aspects of delivery meet the standards set out in Managing Public Money, including regularity, propriety, value for money, and feasibility.

37. The Council applies its established financial controls, procurement procedures, and performance monitoring frameworks to oversee the programme's implementation.

38. The Council will remain the contracting authority therefore must comply with procurement legislation and its own Contract Procedure Rules in relation to spend approved by the Board. It is essential that the procurement team is provided with sufficient notice of spend to enable a compliant procurement procedure is followed.

39. All investment decisions are subject to rigorous appraisal through the Neighbourhood Board's Appraisal Subgroup, which assesses proposals against strategic objectives, community need, and deliverability. This subgroup is supported by a 'Project Board' consisting of Council officers.

40. The programme is delivered in line with Best Value principles, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively to achieve maximum impact. Governance is underpinned by the Nolan Principles of Public Life, with transparent decision-making, ethical conduct, and accountability embedded throughout.

41. Regular reporting, stakeholder engagement, and independent scrutiny further supports assurance and continuous improvement across the programme lifecycle.

Legal Implications

42. The relevant local authority in each place is required to act as the accountable body for the funds with responsibility for ensuring that public funds are distributed fairly and effectively, and that funds have been managed in line with the Nolan Principles and Managing Public Money principles. The local authority is also acting as secretariat to the Board. Local Authorities are required to embed appropriate processes and controls for oversight of the fund.

HR Implications

43. Provisions within the fund allow additional capacity to manage the programme. Revisions are being made the Partnerships Team to accommodate the additional work required.

Estates and Property Advice

44. Advice is sought on projects that involve, or are connected to, Council property from Council's Estates and Property Manager. Currently this is the case for the STEM Centre project.

Procurement Advice

45. All procurement activity will be carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and current procurement legislation.
46. The Council's Procurement Manager is involved at the project development phase so can provide appropriate advice. A Plan for Neighbourhoods Project Board has been established so that all relevant Council officers are involved from the outset.
47. There will be a firm grip of capital spend from the outset with a Capital Programmes Manager providing oversight. All major capital spend will be managed by the Council's Capital Projects team.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

48. All building works will comply with the current energy efficiency regulations.

Equalities considerations

49. The Council's Inclusion, Engagement & Performance Manager has helped design the community engagement exercise and continues to provide advice to the Board.

Consultation

50. The Board recognised the importance of Community Engagement and requested the voluntary and community sector collectively through the Voluntary and Community Sector

Strategy Group to conduct engagement. Importantly, whilst there would be a focus on left behind neighbourhoods, it was felt important to hear the views all residents in Darlington.

51. The community engagement exercise generated 2,398 responses, vastly more than any similar exercise in Darlington providing a sound evidence base for the programme.
52. A comprehensive community engagement strategy was developed to ensure meaningful participation, with local communities remaining central to the Pride in Place programme throughout its duration. The strategy recognises the importance of building trust and empowering residents. An approach that requires consistency, dedication, and time, alongside clear evidence that community priorities are being acknowledged and acted upon.
53. To support this strategy, a structured programme of engagement was implemented. This began with the launch of a Community Survey, designed to capture residents' views and perceptions of their communities. The survey included a combination of multiple-choice questions and open-ended responses to allow for both quantitative and qualitative insights. Engagement activities were delivered through 18 events held in Darlington Market Square, attracting a broad and diverse audience. In addition, five face-to-face events were held within the five targeted communities to ensure localised engagement.
54. A range of bespoke outreach activities were also undertaken, including visits to care homes and clubs for the deaf and blind. These sessions provided tailored support to help residents complete the survey. Promotion of the survey was extended through various channels, including the Talking Newspaper, Independent Living Forums, and social work teams supporting individuals with sensory impairments.
55. To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, the survey was made available in an easy-read format, translated into seven languages, and distributed via a QR code to facilitate digital access.
56. In the process, the names of people who are interested in being involved going forward were gathered which can be used to launch the all-important community development work.

Outcome of Consultation

57. Initial findings from the community engagement programme reveal that 56% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood, while 31% feel neutral, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. A strong sense of safety was reported, with 1,690 out of 1,860 respondents stating they feel safe in their local area.

58. Key insights include:

- (a) 1,019 residents expressed a desire for increased youth services across neighbourhoods.
- (b) 1,172 respondents called for a stronger presence of police and community wardens.
- (c) There was a clear emphasis on improving community spaces to foster social connections and cohesion.
- (d) Residents also highlighted the need for more locally accessible services, including health, employment, and general welfare support.
- (e) Additional support for disabled residents within their own communities was also a recurring theme.

59. The Neighbourhood Board has partnered with Teesside University who are carrying out a detailed analysis of the finding