

# Darlington Borough Council

## Council Plan Performance Management Report

### 2025/26 Quarter 2

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## Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

Darlington is a wonderful place to live and work and we want opportunities to be accessible to everyone.

We will have a long-term focus on understanding and addressing the causes of inequality ensuring our communities are safe and can thrive.

### **Develop a cross-council approach based on an in-depth understanding of inequalities and their causes, with a focus on local communities experiencing disadvantage**

The council's policy team is undertaking analysis of data on child poverty in Darlington and the actions the Council is currently undertaking to address poverty in the Borough. This work will be considered by the Strategic Leadership Team and Extended Leadership Team.

The analysis of this work is intended to inform the approach the council takes to addressing this challenge, how collaborating with voluntary, public and business partners could be focused to address inequality, and how discretionary funding, such as the Plan for Neighbourhoods, may be deployed. The team has also taken an active role as a member of the NE Child Poverty Commission to support their work and lobbying on the key issues for the national child poverty strategy.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

**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**

The Senior Leadership Team represented by the Chief Executive and Group Directors is responsible for ensuring all new strategies and plans consider inequalities. Information regarding progress with the inclusive growth strategy and the health and wellbeing strategy can be found elsewhere within this performance report. The internal policy and strategy network continues to provide a valuable forum for those with a responsibility for policy development to come together to share learning and briefings on the latest insights.

Data from a wide range of sources is regularly gathered and analysed to ensure the council has a good understanding of inequalities across the borough and wider region. The Darlington Profile 2025 report on the state of the borough has been developed and presented to senior leadership teams. The report provides a clear accessible overview of key data and trends affecting Darlington and presents headline findings to inform strategic decision-making.

The Indices of Deprivation 2025 were published by government on the 30th October. Analysis on deprivation and inequalities within the borough will be shared with senior leadership teams and used to inform key priorities including the development of the inclusive growth strategy and Pride In Place regeneration plan.

Lead Officer: Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

**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. We will work with communities to understand first-hand the challenges they face**

Household Support Fund (HSF) Round 7 is being delivered through voluntary and community organisations including:

- Vouchers during holiday period for children currently in receipt of Free School Meals
- Support for Care Leavers
- 1523 Vulnerable households requiring additional support including lone parents and low income pensioners.
- Elderly residents will be offered support in energy proofing their homes via Age UK
- Darlington-based foodbanks will be supported with food provision
- Support through citizens advice for 1500 households experiencing financial hardship

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Core Principle: Addressing inequalities

## Core Principle: Tackling climate change

The changing climate impacts all our lives now and we know this is particularly important to our younger residents.

One of the first things we did when we came to office was bring forward by 10 years, to 2040, the Council's commitment to being carbon neutral.

### Deliver the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040

Darlington Borough Council continues to make steady progress toward its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2040 through the delivery of its Climate Change Action Plan. Over the past quarter, significant steps have been taken across departments, including the completion of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Wave 2 project, installation of a new Combined Heat and Power (CHP) unit at the Dolphin Centre, and the integration of low-carbon technologies in new housing schemes. The Council has also secured £3.5m in government funding for the Warm Homes project, aiming to upgrade over 1,000 homes.

To ensure continued momentum, the Action Plan has been revised to reflect progress made and to align with updated departmental goals. This includes the removal of actions no longer viable, the addition of new initiatives such as the Nature Restoration Emergency Action Plan, and the refinement of targets based on feasibility and resource availability. Cross-departmental collaboration remains central, with ongoing work in areas such as sustainable transport, energy efficiency, and climate adaptation. The Council remains committed to transparent reporting and adaptive planning to meet its 2040 target.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change



**Involve all parts of the council in a cross-council approach to sustainability and climate change**

Darlington Borough Council continues to embed sustainability and climate action across all departments through a coordinated, cross-council approach. The Climate Change Action Plan is being actively delivered by teams spanning Housing, Transport, Planning, Leisure, Public Health, Adult Social Care, Waste, and more. Each service area has identified and implemented tailored actions, from integrating low-carbon technologies in capital projects to promoting sustainable travel, improving energy efficiency in council buildings, and enhancing biodiversity.

This quarter, departments have updated their actions to reflect progress and evolving priorities. For example, Housing Services completed Wave 2 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and is preparing for Wave 3, while Countryside Services has set a new 100,000-tree planting target. Meanwhile, Adult Social Care and Public Health are addressing climate resilience through seasonal health communications and vulnerability mapping.

The revised action plan ensures that all services remain aligned with the Council’s 2040 net zero target, with regular reporting and collaboration supporting a whole-council culture of sustainability.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change

**Work alongside our business community collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero**

Darlington Borough Council continues to work closely with the local business community to support the transition to net zero. Through the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership (DEEP), we are promoting best practice and encouraging collaboration on sustainability. Recent actions include the addition of sustainability content in the Darlington Business Newsletter, signposting businesses to relevant guidance and support. We are also highlighting local businesses offering climate-related services and support.

To further strengthen engagement, we have appointed Decerna to provide expert advice on energy efficiency and net zero strategies for local businesses. This is complemented by our participation in regional and local climate events to build networks and share knowledge. A pipeline of potential projects is being developed to ensure readiness for future funding opportunities, and we are exploring new communication formats such as podcasts to raise awareness of climate risks and opportunities.

These actions have been revised to reflect progress made and updated goals across departments, ensuring our approach remains responsive and impactful.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Tackling climate change

Work with partners, government, public and private sectors and residents for a resilient Darlington so we are able to respond and adapt to change.

Darlington Employers Environment Partnership (DEEP) was set up in 2023. It brings together like-minded local businesses to generate more sustainable outcomes from products, services and approaches.

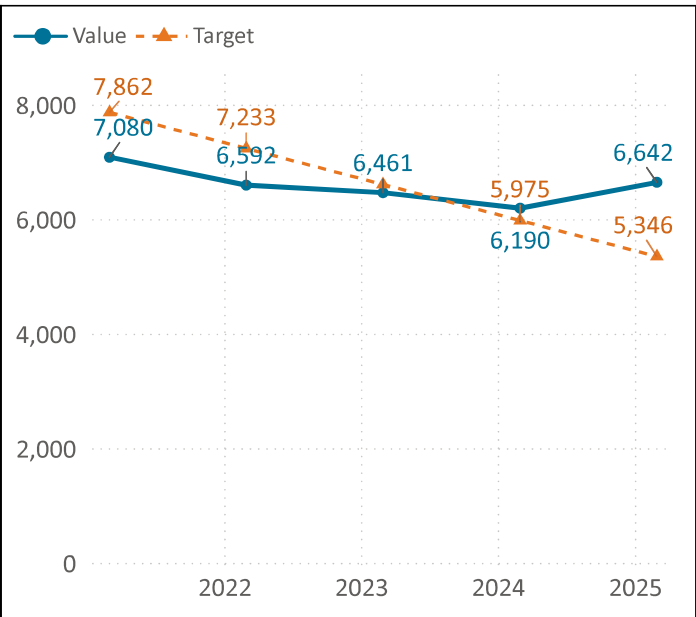
There are three primary benefits for businesses who join: to network and learn from each other, to make direct contact with businesses that can help them reduce their carbon footprint and to promote their businesses achievements towards Net Zero. DEEP has just welcomed it's 50th member Teesside Airport

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director  
Core Principle: Tackling climate change

Darlington Borough Council emissions (tonnes of CO2 equivalent)

We are still investigating the increase in emissions for 2024, but this will be related to the opening of Hopetown, a new meter at our Allington Road depot, and the works being carried out at the Dolphin Centre. The works here will lead to savings once the work is complete. We are taking forward work to establish and reduce emissions from our supply chain.

Following the declaration of a nature recovery emergency, to sit alongside the existing climate change emergency, we have revised the strategy and this is now available on the Council's website. The climate change action plan is being revised and a new, nature recovery action plan will be developed.



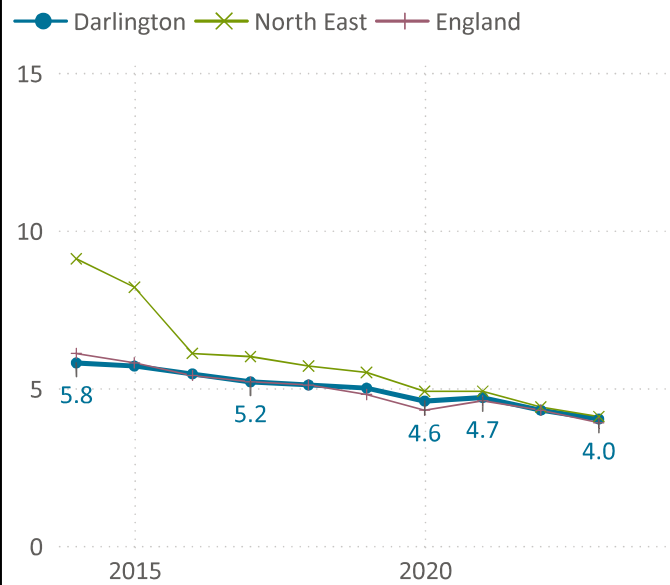
Lead Officer: David Hand: Head of Planning Policy, Economic Strategy & Environment  
Core Principle: Tackling climate change  
Key Deliverable: Deliver the climate change action plan to make Darlington Borough Council carbon neutral by 2040

CO2 emissions per capita (tonnes of CO2 equivalent)

Data for this indicator is published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero in summer. Data is two years in arrears, so relates to 2023.

Per capita emissions for Darlington are 4.02 tonnes CO2. This is just under the North East per capita figure (4.1 tonnes) and just above the per capita figure for England (3.9 tonnes).

The annual Eco Fair in June 2025 was again successful and we are planning the next event for June 2026. We continue to encourage action from residents, businesses and schools through direct messaging, through One Darlington and via social media.



- Lead Officer:

David Hand: Head of Planning Policy, Economic Strategy & Enviroment
- Core Principle:

Tackling climate change
- Key Deliverable:

Work alongside our business community collaborating with groups such as the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership to transition to net zero

## Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

We will remain focussed on the financial sustainability of the council, ensuring good governance.

We will deliver the best services possible, with the resources we have, for our residents, communities, and businesses.

### Deliver a balanced Medium Term Financial Plan and positive Value For Money outcome

Council approved the 2025/26 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) at their February 2025 meeting. The quarter 2 revenue budget management projection reported to Cabinet on 4th November, shows a decline of £1.872m on the agreed MTFP. Further details can be found within the report.

All services continue to scrutinise their budgets, challenging expenditure or increasing income, to assist with the current and future years budgets and to ensure value for money.

The Council has commenced budget setting for the next MTFP 2026/27 to 2029/30, which will be presented to Full Council in February 2026.

The Council's auditors Forvis Mazars review of value for money in the Council's 2024/25 accounts did not identify any significant weakness in the arrangements to secure value for money in the use of the Council resources.

Lead Officer: Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Deliver high quality governance and decision making

Statutory officers met to review the Local Code of Corporate Governance and work progress on 9 June 2025 and 8 September 2025.

The Member Working Group to review Council Decision Making and the role of Scrutiny Committees met on 6 May 2025, 1 July 2025 and 16 September 2025.

Since April, training has been delivered on the Members' Code of Conduct and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

Council, Cabinet and Committee papers have been reviewed throughout the year for compliance and delegated decisions review meetings have also been held.

The Register of gifts and hospitality has been updated throughout the year.

Staff and member comms have been circulated where required, such as with regard to the pre election period.

Lead Officer: Amy Wennington: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Review and refresh the Asset Management Plan

The production of a draft Strategic Asset Plan (to replace the existing, now dated, Asset Management Plan) is in progress.

The draft now needs updating to accord with the Council Plan and the Council's priorities and following consultation with the Resources Portfolio Holder it is intended to refer the report to Cabinet in Spring 2026, subject to input from the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, if considered necessary.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Review and refresh the Procurement Strategy

The Council spends millions of pounds every year and we want to use money effectively and achieve value by purchasing and procuring what we need at the right price and quality. The Council Plan prioritises growing the local economy and procurement activity can help in delivering this goal.

The Procurement Strategy 2025 – 2027 was developed to ensure the Council procures goods, services and works in line with the Procurement Act 2023 (which came into force on 24 February 2025), the Council Plan and our key objectives. The plan will direct and inform our procurement activity and was approved by Cabinet on 8 April 2025 following consultation. The council's procurement activity will be driven by the following key objectives and be kept under review;

- 1) Working together
- 2) Delivering quality and value for money
- 3) Social Value
- 4) Climate change
- 5) Governance and compliance
- 6) Local economy
- 7) Innovation, improvement and forward planning.

Lead Officer: Amy Wennington: Assistant Director - Law & Governance

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Build on the Capital Project Management process by introducing an enhanced ICT system to improve efficiency and effectiveness

In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Capital Project delivery, the Capital Projects team have worked alongside the Xentrall team to develop a bespoke project management system within Microsoft Teams.

This system, which is known as ProBox allows a more efficient flow and recording of information and feeds into the Project Position Statement which is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The system is being used by the Capital Projects team on new capital projects.

Lead Officer: Anthony Hewitt: Assistant Director - Highways & Capital Projects

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Review and deliver the workforce strategy

Following a period of design and engagement with key stakeholders we have completed our new Workforce Strategy for 2025 to 2030 which has been endorsed by the Joint Consultative Committee.

The Workforce Strategy is underpinned by five frameworks (Include, Engage and Retain, Attract and Recruit, Develop and Lead, Health and Wellbeing and Smarter Working).

We have now launched initial communication activity as part of the roll out to staff.

Lead Officer: Brett Nielsen: Assistant Director - Resources

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

## Maximise income through new joint venture companies, increase levels of business rates by growing the local economy; and maximise grant opportunities

The Council's ongoing and successful Joint Venture relationship with ESH Homes Ltd continues to deliver on a number of housing sites in the Borough.

The development of 44 units at Heritage Park, Blackwell is well underway with over 14 already completed. The Elderbrook Park and Hurworth Meadows developments at Neasham Road are also progressing well and will deliver circa 200 units.

Infrastructure works at Burtree Garden Village are now underway and the Esh JV are expected to be on site in Spring 2026 to bring forward circa 350 units. Pre-application consultation and initial feasibility has also progressed at the Coniscliffe Road site to bring it forward for the development of circa 80 units.

The Council is continuing to work with Esh Homes Ltd to identify other potential residential development opportunities for the Joint Venture'.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Explore opportunities to exploit digital assets to create efficiencies and increase productivity, including online delivery**

To support the implementation of the Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30, the Council has formed an Artificial Intelligence Strategy & Ethics Group, comprising experts from various fields including HR, communications, climate change, equality & diversity, and finance, as well as staff completing AI apprenticeships. This group objectively evaluates AI tools for Council adoption and recently recommended rolling out Microsoft CoPilot to staff, a plan approved by the Systems and Information Governance Group (SIGG) and set for implementation before Christmas.

The Council has completed a pilot of the AI meeting transcription tool, Minute, developed by i.AI within Government Digital Services (GDS). This involvement has advanced the Council’s understanding of AI governance and training, and the tool has helped to identify opportunities for efficiency benefits, with permission granted for wider use among staff at no cost until the end of March 2026, while GDS considers the future delivery model for Minute.

Additionally, the People directorate has been trialling Magic Notes, a commercial AI tool tailored for specific statutory meetings in social services. Staff feedback has been highly positive, leading to an extended trial to better assess its benefits prior to a decision on long-term adoption.

Lead Officer: Neil Bowerbank: Head of Strategy, Performance & Communications

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources

**Continue to build strong relationships with partners, residents and communities.**

The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group continues to be an effective way for the Council to engage with the sector. It is working with the Council to deliver Household Support Fund and is supporting the Plan for Neighbourhoods Board.

The Public Sector Executive Group continues to provide a means for the Chief Executive to meet with her counterparts in the other public sector agencies.

Lead Officer: Seth Pearson: Darlington Partnerships Director

Core Principle: Efficient and effective use of resources



## Council Plan Priority: Economy

Building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.

**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**

Initial engagement workshops and meetings completed, and a draft delivery framework and plan have been produced. Work is now underway on:

- Building the evidence base/local economic assessment/current challenges
- Defining Strategic Vision & Objectives
- Identifying Key Economic Opportunities

The delivery framework sets out the approach to developing a new five-year Inclusive Growth Strategy and short-term Action Plan for Darlington. It highlights that:

- The new strategy will establish an economic baseline and a clear vision including overarching economic goals and objectives.
- The Action Plan will outline immediate actions necessary to implement the strategic vision.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes**

The council is collaborating with a diverse range of local stakeholders to refresh the Town Centre Strategy and update the accompanying Action Plan.

This work is bringing together key town centre stakeholders from a cross-sector of interests. The refreshed strategy and action plan will reaffirm key priorities and objectives, and outline practical steps to enhance economic vitality, improve public spaces, and strengthen the town centre's role as a hub for business, leisure, and community life. As part of Town Centre Strategy refresh process, the stakeholder group will be reconvened in early 2026.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Ensure that the borough is safe, clean and maintained to levels that support the economy and encourage inward investment**

Street Scene continues to sustain levels of cleanliness to high standards within the constraints of available resources. Overall cleanliness of the area following independent auditing confirms an average score of 85% which falls within the 'excellent' category.

Prevention and education measures are used to intervene in problems, with enforcement being a tool that can be used as and when appropriate to help protect the appearance of the town, damage to the environment and public health issues. The Council works closely with partners to try to ensure that appropriate action is taken to address crime and anti-social behaviour. The Council participated in the Home Office Safer Streets Summer Initiative which was targeted at town and city centres across the country with increased Police and civic enforcement patrols.

The Council updated the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the town centre and this came into operation in July 2025. A Boroughwide PSPO was also introduced to deal with issues associated with side waste, begging and stray dogs.

In October 2025, the Council received a 'gold award' in the town centre category of the 2025 Britain in Bloom Awards, reflecting the appearance of the town centre and the community efforts that go into ensuring we have a clean and well maintained town centre for residents, businesses and visitors to enjoy.

Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **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.**

The Council continues to work with employers in the local area to develop good job and career opportunities. Working with individual or clusters of local businesses, they are encouraged to develop their skills pipeline and invest in recruiting and sustaining talent by helping identify the support and training they need.

The Skills Booster event took place in the summer, bringing together a range of employment and workforce support organisations to help those individuals looking to move on from existing employment.

In October, the Destination STEM Hometown event attracted 2,000 children and almost 50 employers to explore a range of STEM activities.

In the new year, Darlington Jobs Fair will once again be happening.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Provide more education and skills opportunities for residents by delivering the Adult Skills Centre and collaborating with providers and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)**

The Council's Learning & Skills Service and Darlington College are jointly developing an adult skills centre in the old Northern Echo building to provide additional town centre learning opportunities. The planned date for completion of the centre is now May 2026.

As part of the government's Getting Britain Working initiative, council staff are working with TVCA, DWP and the DfE, to develop the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer programme, to encourage 18-21 year olds into employment, and the Connect to Work programme which supports those with disabilities, long term health issues, or multiple and complex barriers into work.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## Work with Market Asset Management to deliver improvements to the historic indoor market

The market hall continues to welcome a mix of exciting new businesses, nurturing fresh life into the space. The market hall has also become a thriving events destination. It played host to a major Festival of Lights event as part of the Diwali celebrations.

Darlington market hall recently took part in the northern launch of High Street Positives; a collective initiative aimed at revitalising and reimagining British high streets. Attendees included local business owners, community leaders, and policymakers, all coming together to share ideas and celebrate local successes.

The Council, Market Asset Management, Darlington College and DEC have been working together on a pilot project as part of the Government's new Community Mission initiative. The focus of the Darlington pilot is "Supporting Young People into Work, Improving Skills and Seeing Enterprise as a Viable and Aspirational Career Pathway". This programme is now being delivered by Darlington College, MAM and the North-East Business Innovation Centre, aiming to enthuse and develop entrepreneurial skills in young people with a pop-up shop in the market hall.

Terms of reference for the Advisory Board have been produced, and an initial inception meeting is now scheduled with the aim of implementing the full Advisory Group in early 2026.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## Accelerate the delivery of key sites to the market to attract private sector investment, including Darlington Science Park, Ingenium Parc and Symmetry Park

The Council continues to work with key stakeholders, investors and individual businesses to attract new investment to Darlington.

Working with Greenbox Darlington, Tritax Big Box and Lingfield Point, we continue to promote opportunities for the logistics sector. Greenbox Darlington recently secured its first letting with heating, cooling and infrastructure trade specialist Wolseley on a 107,775 sq ft site.

Working with TVCA, the Council attended UKREiiF 2025, a major real estate, property and infrastructure conference in Leeds that brings together over 16,000 sector professionals to discuss, drive investment and regeneration. The event provided an opportunity to showcase Darlington and everything it has to offer to potential investors and developers.

Meanwhile, the Council also featured in Commercial Property magazine, with a major advertorial highlighting investment opportunities in the town.

Working with partners from CPI and Teesside University a new marketing and promotion campaign for the remaining sites at Darlington Science Park is under development and will complement the wider branding/promotion of opportunities at Darlington Science Park.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Deliver the Towns Fund projects, including the refurbishment of the Northern Echo building to secure new business occupiers**

The Towns Fund Programme remains in the latter stages of delivery. The refurbishment of the former Northern Echo building is making good progress with the ground and first floors due for completion in early 2026, and the upper floors due to be delivered on target by the end of 2026.

Improvements to shopfronts along Skinnergate and the Yards will finish by the end of 2025, inclusive of the public realm works to Coniscliffe Road which completed to budget in Summer 2025.

Remaining shopfront works on Victoria Road are also due to complete by the end of 2025.

On Northgate the redevelopment of no.156 into office accommodation is underway and due to complete in Spring 2026, and the refurbishment of Edward Pease House is awaiting revised costings from the contractor to commence works.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

## **Work effectively with Darlington Economic Campus to fully realise the opportunities this investment presents to the town and its communities**

The Council continues to work closely with officers from the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) on a range of activities.

The Council has worked with Government Property Agency to complete the necessary planning requirements to enable construction of the new DEC building on Brunswick Street to commence, with Kier Construction breaking ground in September 2025.

Darlington has recently been selected as a testbed for the Government's new Community Mission initiative with a pilot project centred on the Government's "Growth Mission" i.e. economic development, regeneration, and opportunity creation. Working with DEC, a short term project using collective resources has been implemented focussed on "Supporting Young People into Work, Improving Skills and Seeing Enterprise as a Viable and Aspirational Career Pathway".

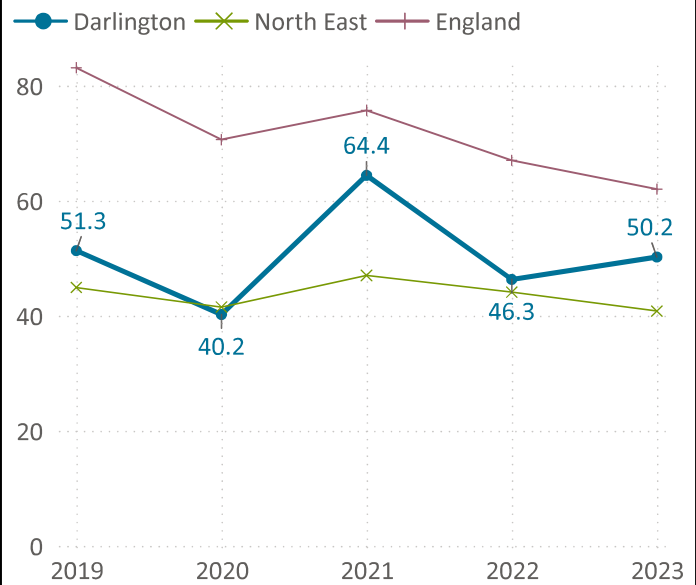
At a wider engagement level, DEC have played a major role in supporting the Council with the delivery of a number of skills and workforce development events, such as the Darlington Jobs Fair, Skills Booster and Destination STEM Hopetown, promoting the various career opportunities and skills requirements that are available within the civil service in Darlington.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

New business registration rate per 10,000 residents

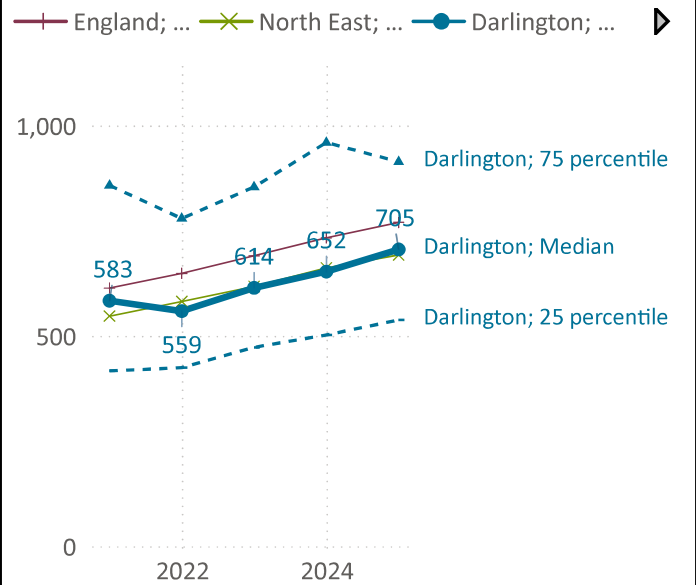
New business formation rates tend to fluctuate in Darlington year on year. Between 2022 and 2023, the rate increased from 46.3 to 50.2 new business registrations per 10,000 residents. However, the longer term trend is that the rate has fallen since 2018, an overall trend mirrored by both the rates for the North East and England. In 2023, the number of new business registrations per 10,000 residents in Darlington was 50.2, higher than the North East (40.8), but still lower than the England rate of 62.0.



- Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection
- Council Plan Priority: Economy
- Key Deliverable: 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

Weekly gross pay for full time workers (Residents)

Darlington's resident median weekly income for full time workers was £705.20 in 2025, slightly higher than the north east figure of £692.10, but below the England value of £769.50. The median figure for Darlington (£705.20) is closer to the lower quartile (£537.60) than the upper quartile (£913.50), indicating that half of the population earns within a relatively narrow range. The scale of this range has reduced since 2024, with a range of £375.90, compared to £457.30 in 2024. The upper quartile (£913.50) is much higher, suggesting a significant income disparity for higher earners.



- Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection
- Council Plan Priority: Economy
- Key Deliverable: 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

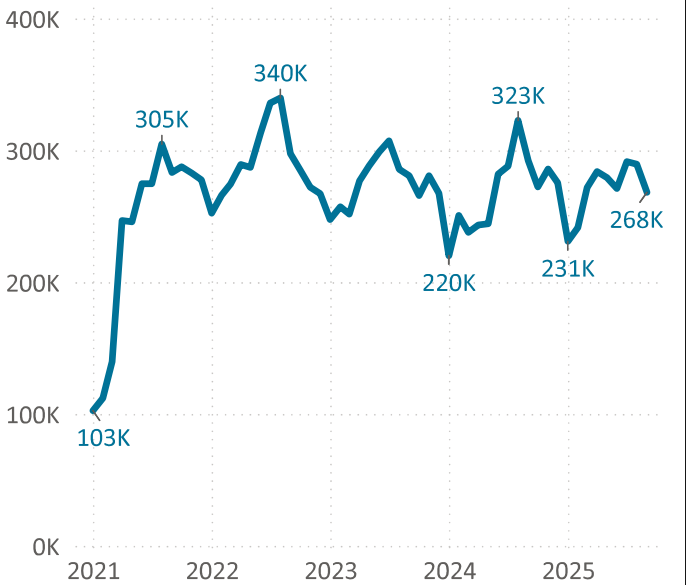
Town centre footfall weekly average for the month

Ongoing town centre animation and a vibrant events calendar aims to encourage town centre visits and encourage visitors to stay longer, explore more, and enjoy an enhanced experience across Darlington.

Interactive trails and events are designed to draw new customers into stores. The events team works closely with town centre businesses to support retail and hospitality.

Occupancy remains steady at around 85%, boosted by new openings that add to the town’s vibrancy. More businesses are expected soon, likely reducing vacancy rates further.

UK retail footfall declined for the sixth consecutive month in October. Source: Retail Gazette



Lead Officer: Mike Crawshaw: Head of Culture & Heritage

Council Plan Priority: Economy

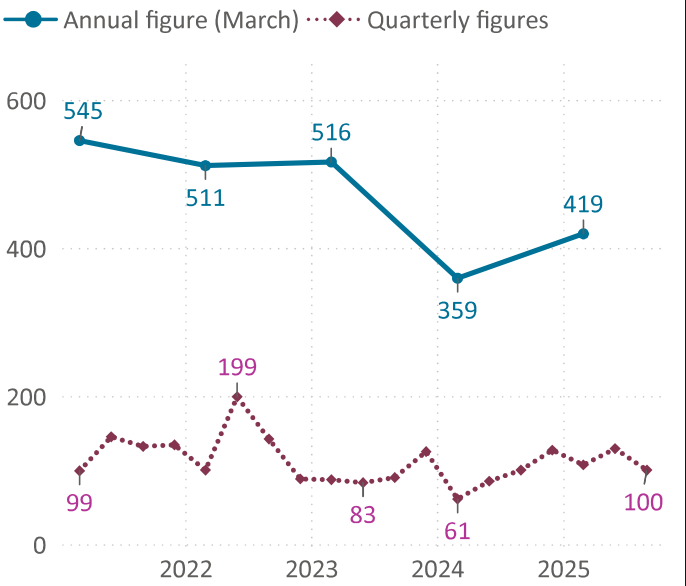
Key Deliverable: Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes

New homes delivered, annually

Housing delivery has seen a significant recovery since the 2023/24 financial year. The previous fall in delivery can be directly attributed to the Nutrient Neutrality (NN) designation affecting the whole Tees Catchment.

Applications are now progressing and gaining consent largely due to the Natural England NN credit scheme. The Borough has fared well in the proportion of credits allocated to developments in Darlington.

Latest monitoring indicates this recovery trend will continue. Our completions for this quarter were 100, which is down from the 129 completions in Q1. It gives a cumulative figure for the year so far of 229, which is 44 completions higher than at this point last year.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

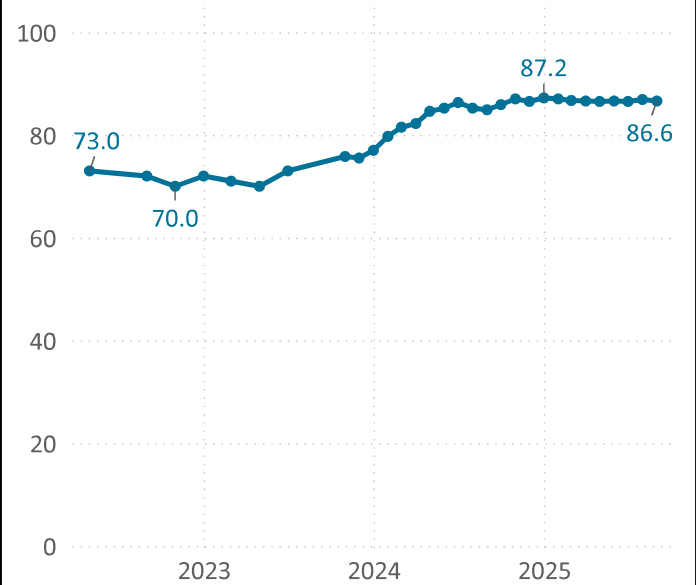
Key Deliverable: Establish a place-based partnership to support the continued renewal of the town centre delivering more jobs and more homes

Land Audit Management System - Litter Score (Environmental Quality Survey)

The Litter Score is a 12-month rolling average percentage score of the 40 transects inspected for litter every month. Two wards are covered each month, in which twenty areas of the ward are inspected. Each ward is covered once within a 12-month period.

An inspection scores cleanliness of an area based on the grading system of the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE). Sites are graded from grade A to D. A score over 70% represents 'good' performance.

The latest 12-month average pass rate for litter is 86.6%. This is a rise from the 84.9% when compared to September 2024. As well as litter, the inspections include detritus, weeds, dog fouling, grass, shrubs and hedges, flowerbeds and overflowing public bins. The overall 12-month average pass rate is 85.0% which is an increase from 82.2% reported in September 2024.



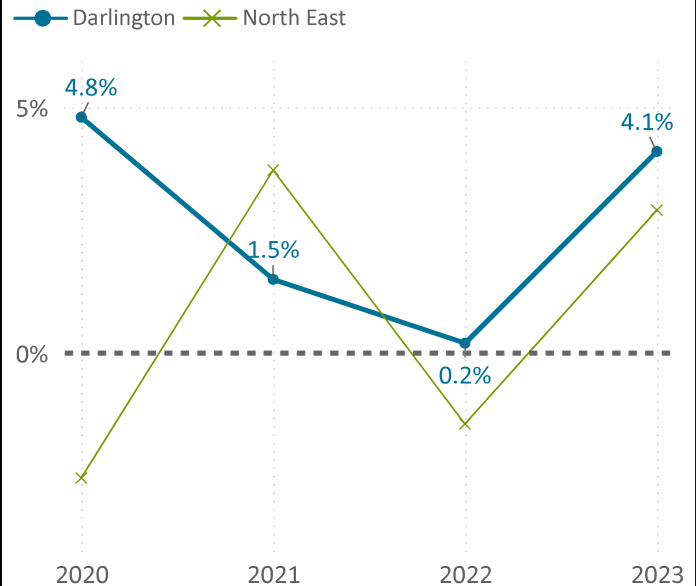
Lead Officer: Ben Grabham: Assistant Director - Environmental Services & Community Safety

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: Ensure that the borough is safe, clean and maintained to levels that support the economy and encourage inward investment

Change in total employment since previous year

This measure shows the difference in total employment (both Public and Private) compared to the same point 12 months previously, in order to show the number of jobs created in Darlington within the last year. The number of new employment opportunities shows an increase in 2023 to 4.1%, slightly better than the North East regional rate of 2.9%. This measure currently shows that the growth in total employment has now recovered to pre-pandemic levels of 2020 and 2019.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

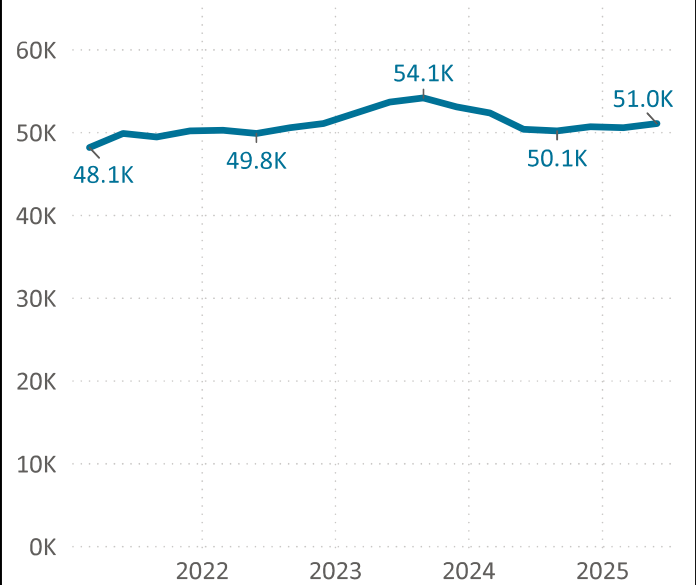
Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: 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.



## Number of people employed including self-employed

As of June 2025, the total number of people employed (including both employees and self-employed individuals) now stands at 51,000. This is an increase of 700 on the same time 12 months previously. The number peaked at 54,100 in September 2023. There's no stand out reason for this overall decline, and it could be due to a variety of factors such as national economic challenges, shifts in local industries, or broader regional trends. Nevertheless, the long-term trendline (since 2020) demonstrates a gradual increase.



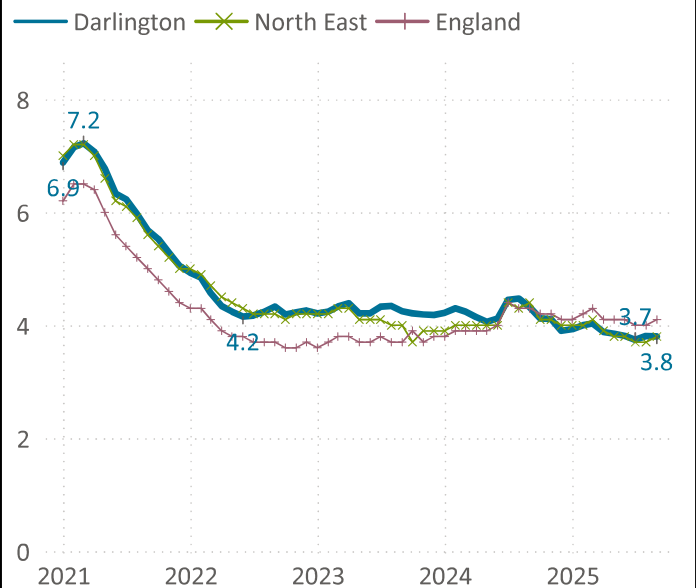
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: 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.

## Monthly unemployed claimant count (%)

Since mid-2022 to date, the monthly unemployed claimant count in Darlington has remained relatively static - a trend which is mirrored in national and regional statistics. The claimant count in September 2025 stands at 3.8% - a reduction of 0.5% in the last 12 months. The rate in Darlington is below the England rate (4.1%) and equal to the North East rate (3.8%). The static nature of this measure since 2022 can be attributed to several factors, including economic inactivity, post-pandemic labour market mismatches and economic uncertainty.



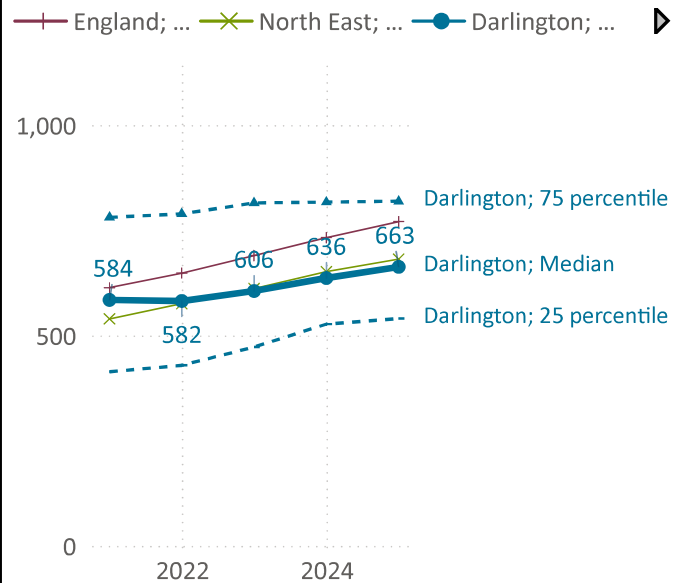
Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

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Weekly gross pay for full time workers (Employees)

Darlington’s employee median weekly income for full time workers was £662.90 in 2025, slightly lower than the north east figure of £681.20, but below the England value of £770.70. The median figure for Darlington (£662.90) is closer to the lower quartile (£540.00) than the upper quartile (£819.00), indicating that half of the population earns within a relatively narrow range. The scale of this range has remained consistent since 2024, with a range of £279.00, compared to £289.90 in 2024.



Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Economy

Key Deliverable: 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.

## Council Plan Priority: Homes

Affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents.

### **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**

Our new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2025-30 was approved by Cabinet in March 2025. The key priorities in the strategy are:

- Working with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness
- Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our Rough Sleeper Plan
- Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation
- Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs
- Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision
- Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources

Our first multi-agency homelessness forum was held in June 2025 and was well attended. Task and finish groups were set-up to look at accommodation, specialist accommodation, prevention and support. Feedback from the task and finish groups took place at the second forum in November 2025. Progress against the strategy will be formally reviewed by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee in March 2026. In addition, we are also increasing the supply of good quality temporary accommodation by purchasing and refurbishing former Council homes, previously bought through the Right to Buy scheme. Options to lease properties in the private sector are also being explored as an alternative to placing people in expensive and inappropriate B&B accommodation. The Council, in partnership with WayThrough Charity, was successful in bidding for £770,000 from the Government's Single Homeless Accommodation Programme. The project, called Thrive Darlington, has used part of the funding to purchase 12 units of accommodation for supporting single homeless people. The 700 Club is currently pioneering a small-scale scheme of 12 properties, in partnership with Homes England, called 'Forever Homes', which seeks to move families affected by homelessness out of temporary accommodation.

Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## Review our approach to empty homes across the borough so more quality homes are available

According to Government data (October 2024) there were 1,921 empty properties on the database. This equates to approximately 3% of all properties registered.

At this time there were 666 long-term empty homes, those dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over six months.

The Council does not have a dedicated resource to deal with empty homes, service requests are currently received from several sections of the council using various pieces of legislation. While planning and environment legislation have been used on several occasions, the complexity of housing legislation has been less employed.

The use of legislation may address a particular problem in time, it does not necessarily address the fundamental issue of the property being vacant. However the number of problematic long-term empty properties has been found to be very low.

A review of empty homes and the legislation used by each section of the Council has been carried out and a pilot project has been proposed to deal with the most problematic properties where ownership of the property is unknown.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes

## Support the delivery of more social houses and supported accommodation by building more council homes and working with other social landlords and charities

Our Council housing new build site at Neasham Road will deliver 150 new homes, including 130 affordable rented properties, 19 rent to buy properties and one property for Children's Services. The first 54 homes have already been completed with remaining phases due to be completed from November 2025 to April 2026. The scheme has been partly funded by Homes England, with a grant of £7.35 million.

Our Council housing new build site at Sherborne Close (phase 2) commenced in July 2024 and will deliver 14 new homes, including 11 affordable rented properties, 2 rent to buy properties and one property for Children's Services. Completion of the site is due in March 2026. The scheme has been partly funded by Homes England, with a grant of £0.91 million.

Construction of our Council housing site at Skinnergate is due to commence in early 2026, following demolition of the existing commercial buildings. The site will deliver new shops and 16 new homes, all of which will be social rented properties, and is due to be completed in 2026-27. A bid for Homes England funding is currently being made and we are expecting a grant of around £2 million to help fund the project.

Further Council housing new build schemes are currently being worked up to increase the availability of social housing in Darlington to help meet additional demand, with over 2,000 households currently registered on our waiting list.

We are also increasing the supply of social housing by purchasing former Council homes, previously bought through the Right to Buy scheme. 10 ex-Council homes have already been bought and are in the process of being refurbished for use as general needs housing and temporary accommodation.

Lead Officer: Anthony Sandys: Assistant Director - Housing & Revenues

Council Plan Priority: Homes

**Develop and deliver a new homes strategy, to address housing need, including ensuring social and affordable homes across the borough, in accordance with the Local Plan**

The draft Homes Strategy went out for consultation in July 2025 which ended September 2025. The responses are being collated and assessed and amendments will be suggested where required.

An Action Plan will also be prepared, which will sit alongside the Housing Strategy to enable delivery of its priorities. It is hoped the Housing Strategy and the Action Plan will be brought forward in the New Year for adoption.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes

**Continue to improve the quality of housing through healthy home design principles and ensuring developers create greater energy efficiency in new homes**

The Council is still awaiting the Government's consideration on Future Homes Standards and changes to Building Regulations as it is still not clear how Planning Authorities can exceed Building Regulation requirements. The Council will continue to monitor Government announcements and advise members when the situation is clear.

The Council may be able to alter planning policy in the review of the Local Plan depending on Government advice. The review of the Local Plan is currently underway and we continue to monitor the direction of Government policy in this regard.

Lead Officer: Trevor Watson: Executive Director - Economy & Public Protection

Council Plan Priority: Homes