

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 15 January 2026

PRESENT – Councillors McGill (Chair), Mrs Culley, Keir, Mahmud, M Nicholson, Snedker and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins and Coe

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors McCollom

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Ben Grabham (Assistant Director Environmental Services and Community Safety), Shaun Trevor (Trading Standards and Animal Health Manager), Neil Bowerbank (Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications), Eleanor Swan (Inclusion, Engagement and Performance Manager), Andrew Casey (Head of Highway Network Management), Gill Hutchinson (Transport Planning Manager), Joanne Roberts (Transport Planning Manager) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

CLS17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS18 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 28 AUGUST 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 28 August 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 28 August 2025 be approved as a correct record.

CLS19 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 - 2025/26

The Assistant Director Community Services, Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects, Head of Community Safety and Assistant Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 2 2025/26.

It was reported that of the 28 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 19 were reported six monthly and nine were reported annually; and that nine indicators were reported by Culture, nine by Community Services, one by Community Safety, one by Trading Standards and Animal Health and nine by Highways and Capital Projects.

The report stated that, when taking into consideration what was the best performance for each indicator and comparing against the same period from the previous year, that five of the nine Culture indicators had improved, three were not as good and one had no data available; that all of the nine Community Services indicators had improved; that the Community Safety indicator was not as good; that the Trading Standards and Animal Health indicator had improved; and in relation to the Highways and Capital Projects indicators, three

had improved whilst 6 were not as good as the previous year.

Discussed ensued regarding the number of visits to Hopetown and Members requested figures for the year to date; and following a question relating to the percentage of household waste that is reused, reduced and recycled, Members were informed that the decline was as a result of reduced garden waste. Members were also reminded that food waste recycling was being launched on 31 March and that recycling would be undertaken on a weekly basis; that these changes would help to improve performance. Members did raise concerns regarding communication to residents and were advised that all households would receive an information pack regarding food waste recycling, which would also include a leaflet pertaining to general recycling and a dedicated comms pack is in place for the launch of food waste recycling. This includes social media, radio and billboards. Members also noted that there is a national website called 'Recycle Now', a recycling locator for locating recycling facilities which anyone can search to see how to recycle any items that cannot be recycled at home.

Members entered into a further discussion regarding the number of registered Street Champions, road maintenance and residents' perceptions and in relation to prosecutions for fly tips, including progress on portable surveillance, Members noted that portable surveillance was being trialled in some areas and it was hoped to be rolled out wider in the future.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CLS20 SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF MODERN SLAVERY

The Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an overview of the Council's role in identifying and tackling modern slavery and its role in supporting the victims, including safeguarding responsibilities, housing, procurement and partnership working, following a request from the Vice Chair of this Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report stated that Modern slavery was an umbrella term for severe forms of exploitation where individuals are controlled and deprived of freedom for personal or commercial gain, including human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, domestic servitude, sexual and criminal exploitation, and child exploitation; and that Local Authorities played an important role in identifying and referring victims, providing safeguarding and housing support, disrupting criminal activity, and ensuring ethical supply chains.

Details were provided of the key features of modern slavery; that in 2024 there 133 cases of potential modern slavery reported to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in the Durham Constabulary area; and reference was made to the four areas that the Local Authority have a key role in tackling modern slavery.

It was reported that support for victims from the Council came in the form of Safeguarding children and adults, youth justice, housing and homelessness services including emergency accommodation; there is a Modern Slavery champion in each relevant service area, Children's, Adult's and Housing; and the report outlined the support provided by each service. Members were also informed that the support and procedures around modern

slavery were comprehensive, involving multiple agencies and that each case was dealt with individually depending on the circumstances of the case.

Discussion ensued regarding proactive work being undertaken to identify victims of modern slavery and Members noted that consideration was being given to the development of an overarching Council policy.

RESOLVED – That the Council’s statutory responsibilities and current actions be noted.

CLS21 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Assistant Director – Highways and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) setting out the requirements and timeline for implementing a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

It was reported that under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Council was required to implement a ROWIP every ten years; that the current plan was now out of date; and that it was necessary to seek views of stakeholders and the public as part of the implementation process.

The submitted report stated that Darlington’s public rights of way network covered a wide variety of landscapes, both rural and urban in nature; that some paths were surfaced and many were tracks across countryside owned by farmers and landowners; and that there were 216 miles (346 kilometres) of rights of way in the borough that also includes the Teesdale Way passing through the southern part of the borough that is a long-distance route.

Details were provided of the process and programme to be followed to ensure maximum opportunity for stakeholder engagement to obtain meaningful feedback to help inform the updated plan and Members were informed that the process would commence in January 2026, in the form of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan – Community & Stakeholder Questionnaire (also previously circulated).

Discussion ensued regarding the definitive Public Rights of Way map, with Members noting that work was ongoing.

RESOLVED – (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That a future draft version of the ROWIP be presented to the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee.

CLS22 RESIDENT'S PARKING ZONE CONSULTATION UPDATE

The Executive Director – Environment, Highways and Community Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the consultation and emerging themes following the recent Borough wide Residents Parking Zone (RPZ) consultation.

The submitted report stated that the Council operates RPZs to prioritise on-street parking for residents in areas where there can also be demand for visitor parking; that the existing policy had been in place for a number of years was subject to a review to ensure it meets current

needs; and that a Quad of Aims submitted by members to consider the implications of vehicles of different sizes and emissions parking within the zones was also being considered as part of the review process.

Details were provided of the emerging themes from the initial findings report that was presented to Members in April 2025; and in terms of the consultation process, which ran from 16 September to 3 November, it was reported that a total of 1373 responses were received which equated to 73 per cent from households within a RPZ and 27 per cent from households no within a current RPZ.

The report provided further details regarding the responses to the consultation and the next steps were outlined.

Following a question, Members were informed that there was a demand for new zones and that clear criteria was required to be in place to identify these; that consideration was being given to both an extension of existing zones and the creation of new zones; and a review of the time restrictions in individual zones could be considered, any changes would be based on clear evidence.

Particular discussion ensued regarding RPZ enforcement. Members were assured that a review of enforcement activity and resource requirement would be undertaken as part of this review. Concerns were also raised regarding the number of permits issued to residents being greater than the number of spaces available.

Members of the public in attendance at the meeting addressed the Committee, highlighting their concerns regarding the current RPZ in relation to Hargreave Terrace and Greenbank Road.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report detailing the consultation responses and emerging themes that are being considered as part of the RPZ Policy review, be noted.

(b) That a further update be provided to this Scrutiny Committee prior to the final approval of the updated draft RPZ policy.

CLS23 DARLINGTON TRANSPORT PLAN - DELIVERY REPORT

The Assistant Director – Highway and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the draft Darlington Transport Plan – Delivery report 2026/27 (also previously circulated) prior to its consideration at Cabinet on 3 March 2026.

The submitted report provided an annual update on highways and transport from a regional and local perspective; outlined delivery, performance and public satisfaction in 2025/26; and sought approval for the 2026/27 Darlington Transport Plan and Highways maintenance programme, including the release of funding.

It was reported that in 2022/23 the Darlington Transport Plan, a Town Centre Transport Plan and Parking Strategy for the borough were adopted by the Council; that work continued in implementing the associated plans; and that there had been good progress on the

development and delivery of the transport capital programme.

Details were provided of the significant funding in the Tees Valley region that had been secured from the Government; and that the Council continued to monitor transport patterns, highway condition, road safety and public satisfaction to inform investment decisions.

Reference was made to the progress on delivery of the Darlington Transport Capital Programme schemes in 2025/26 and the proposed delivery in 2026/27; projects and programmes delivered in partnership with the Tees Valley Combined Authority; and performance and monitoring information 2025/26.

Questions were raised regarding the timescale for the review of Darlington's Electric Vehicle Charging Policy, charging infrastructure including cross pavement channels with Members requesting further details of the site location list for the on street electric vehicle charging; and the work undertaken in relation to highway maintenance.

Further questions were raised regarding active travel, with Members noting that a significant programme of work was in place; the Northern Link road; and in relation to public perception of accessibility Members were informed that a bid into Pride in Place for dropped curbs was being prioritised. Further discussion ensued regarding the bus priority schemes to be delivered across the Tees Valley and what these improvements would look like.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CLS24 REDUCTION OF ROAD HARM REPORT

The Assistant Director – Highway and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) introducing the topic of road harm reduction and beginning the examination of the role of the Council in reducing the impact of the risks posed by road users on residents and visitors to Darlington.

The submitted report stated that road harm covered a wide range of issues including road collision casualties and environmental impacts including air and noise pollution; that an overreliance on private vehicles also had health impacts and a lack of transport accessibility could lead to social isolation, poor mental health and loss of economic activity. It was suggested that an examination into the role of the Council would suit a task and finish style review with an evidence led approach.

It was reported that in 2024 there were 119 collisions in Darlington, resulting in 156 casualties; that of the casualties, two were fatal, 40 were serious and 77 had slight injuries; reference was made to the cost of collisions; and the suggested areas of focus for a review were outlined.

Members were advised of the potential outcomes of a review and Members sought clarification as to whether meetings of a Task and Finish Group could be held virtually.

RESOLVED – That a Task and Finish group be established to examine road harm, causes, consequences and mitigation and that an invitation be extended to the Members of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

CLS25 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously approved work programme.

Members sought clarification regarding the possibility for a review of the key performance indicators relating to this scrutiny committee including how these were presented.

RESOLVED – That the current work programme be noted.

CLS26 QUESTIONS

Questions were raised regarding the public's perception of Darlington Borough Council, with a Member highlighting that further work was required to address this; and membership of this Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the discussion be noted.