

HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 APRIL 2026

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 2026 GROWING HEALTHY

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The Annual Public Health Report is an opportunity for the Director of Public Health to present an independent report on the health and wellbeing of Darlington. This year's report has focused on the health of children and young people, describing the current position of some of the key public health outcomes and the range of services and interventions in place locally to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people across key areas of focus.

Summary

2. The annual report focuses on the stages of pregnancy and birth; early years; primary years and secondary years, whilst also considering the latest healthy lifestyle survey carried out in schools and the key priorities of childhood immunisations, mental health, oral health and substance use.
3. During the development of the report the Director of Public Health also visited three primary schools and one secondary school, to talk to some children and young people. This provided an opportunity to answer some of their questions but also hear about their priorities for supporting good health.
4. A number of recommendations have been made in the report, in response to identified local need and policy priorities. This includes:
 - (a) Continue local efforts to further improve rates of breastfeeding, with a focus on those wards with the lowest rates of breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks of age.
 - (b) Deliver an injury prevention training programme for frontline staff in paediatrics, maternity, accident and emergency and early help to raise awareness of risks and preventative messages.
 - (c) Work in partnership to develop the Best Start Local Plan.
 - (d) Develop a Healthy Weight Strategy, adopting a whole systems approach.
 - (e) Strengthen work with early years settings and schools to improve the nutritional content of food and reduce sugar intake amongst children.
 - (f) Continue the expansion of the supervised toothbrushing scheme in early years settings and expand to other year groups where there is evidence of need.
 - (g) Utilise the healthy lifestyle survey data and National Child Measurement Programme data to support local efforts to minimise the expansion of hot food take aways in identified geographical areas.

- (h) Increase the numbers of young people in treatment for substance addictions, to support positive outcomes.

5. In the 2024/25 report seven recommendations were made for the thematic priority of Starting Well. Work has progressed on these areas, with some of the actions completed whilst others are underway. A brief update is provided below.

(a) Develop an oral health promotion strategy and action plan for Darlington.

- i. An oral health promotion alliance has been established, and the oral health promotion strategy has been drafted and will be published in due course.

(b) Expand toothbrushing schemes to more early years settings.

- i. The supervised toothbrushing scheme is now being delivered in more settings and is also now being accessed in special school settings and across additional year groups in some settings. This programme of work will continue to be a priority going forward.

(c) Use data to develop a better understanding of rates of smoking in pregnancy within Darlington, to ensure support can be targeted at those areas with the highest rates.

- i. Rates of smoking in pregnancy continue to show a downward trend, and local data is included in the health and wellbeing dashboard. Smoking in pregnancy was also included in the Health and Wellbeing Board Deep Dive on pregnancy and early years in June 2025. Smoking in pregnancy has been included as a priority for action in the Best Start Local Plan.

(d) Build upon the recent success with increasing rates of breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks, with a clear focus on reducing the inequalities in breastfeeding that exist within Darlington.

- i. The rates of breastfeeding continue to show an improvement, and local data is included in the health and wellbeing dashboard. Breastfeeding was also included in the Health and Wellbeing Board Deep Dive on pregnancy and early years in June 2025. Breastfeeding has been included as a priority for action in the Best Start Local Plan.

(e) Undertake work to understand the variation in uptake of childhood vaccination across Darlington, working with primary care and the school age immunisation service to increase the uptake of routine childhood vaccinations.

- i. A programme of work is being implemented, with a focus on inclusion groups, to understand barriers and develop an enhanced local offer.

(f) Take steps to understand why there has been a reduction in the percentage of children in care who are up to date with the vaccine schedule and use this information to implement action locally to improve uptake.

- i. A review of the data with services highlighted potential issues with data capture, this work is ongoing, with a focus on maximising uptake and ensuring accurate data recording.

(g) Undertake an audit of hospital admission data for unintentional and intentional injuries in children, using the findings to develop an action plan to address identified priorities.

- i. The audit has been completed and the findings shared with relevant partners. Recommendations from the audit are being used to inform local actions and next steps.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that:-

- (a) The Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee accept the recommendations of the Annual Director of Public Health Report.

Lorraine Hughes
Director of Public Health

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan ambition of Living Well and Staying Healthy, through the focus on health outcomes and inequalities.
Addressing inequalities	The report considers inequalities at a population level.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no implications arising from this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council's Efficiency Programme.
Health and Wellbeing	The annual DPH report considers the health and wellbeing of the population of Darlington across the life course.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no implications arising from this report.
Wards Affected	The data presented in the report covers all wards.
Groups Affected	The annual DPH report focuses on the population of Darlington, it does not look at specific groups.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers