



DRAFT

**Durham County Council
Council Plan
2022/23 to 2025/26 [Refresh]**



Foreword

Durham County Council is ambitious. Following the local elections in May 2021, councillors from different political groups came together to form a joint administration to lead the council for the benefit of the people of County Durham.

The County Council has a significant role to play in improving the lives of everyone who visits, lives or works in the county. As one of the largest unitary councils in the country, with gross expenditure of more than £1 billion each year, the council is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of public services to residents across all aspects of people's lives.

More so than ever, the council needs to listen to residents and businesses and this plan sets out an approach which is inclusive, community orientated and ambitious for County Durham. We are resetting our strategic priorities to provide an inclusive economy and a greater focus on our environment. We have reviewed the plans to occupy the newly constructed building on The Sands in Durham City and developed revised proposals for the location of the council's Headquarters (HQ) functions and use of its estate to support wider economic objectives for the county should the council not occupy The Sands site.

Whilst unavoidable financial pressures continue, we are investing immediately in frontline services such as highways, footpaths and flood prevention. We are actively reviewing several programmes of work to make sure that we still have the right balance between achieving things that matter to local people whilst ensuring we provide value for money. We are focusing on making the council more efficient, keeping council tax rises low to support families through the current cost-of-living pressures and maintaining a package of additional support to financially vulnerable and disadvantaged households.

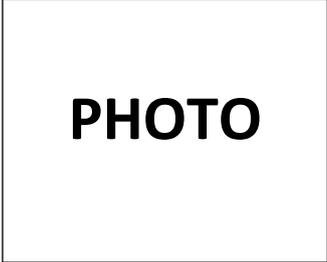
We are rightly proud of our county, our heritage, our people and our culture. We would like to showcase this and place our county on the national and international stage. We did submit a bid for the county to become UK City of Culture in 2025. Whilst we were shortlisted to the final four, we were ultimately unsuccessful, but we remain committed to delivering a pioneering cultural programme with a lasting legacy. We also have taken the decision to re-open and repurpose the former Durham Light Infantry Museum building in Durham City, providing new facilities to increase our cultural offer further.

We know that our county has both opportunities and issues that need to be addressed. Many of the issues facing our residents cannot be solved by the council alone, so we work in partnership with others across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. In 2019, the council and partners agreed a vision for County Durham for 2035 following extensive consultation with our residents. This is to help create more and better jobs, help people live long and independent lives and support communities to be well connected and supportive of each other. This Plan seeks to deliver and build on these ambitions and more.

We want to support our communities as the county emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and we recognise our role, both as a large organisation and as a

community leader, in tackling the climate emergency and addressing ecological decline. We will build on the success of securing our first constituency Levelling Up bid by developing robust bids for the other five constituency areas across county Durham. We will maintain sound management of our resources delivering on these ambitions, maximising the talents of our people and using technology to provide the best services with the resources available.

This plan sets out how the council is contributing to achieving the people’s vision and to ensure that our resources are used in a transparent and effective way, by setting out our priorities to support our economy, our environment and our communities, and further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the council for everyone’s benefit.

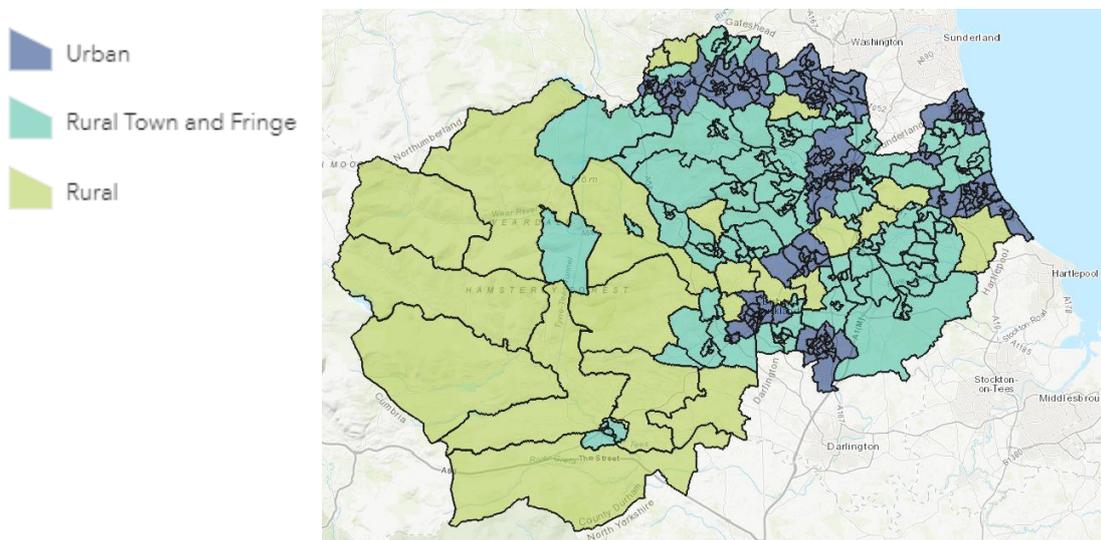


PHOTO

Leader of the Council
and Chief Executive

Population and Area¹

County Durham covers an area of 222,606 hectares (2011) and has an estimated population of circa 533,000. The county is largely rural, with around 57% of its area classified as rural in nature and a further 32% classified as rural town and fringe.



Land type	Area of county	population	Population density per hectare
Rural	57%	7%	0.3
Rural Town and Fringe ²	32%	37%	2.7
Urban	11%	56%	12.1

Durham is a large and diverse county with a highly dispersed settlement pattern which creates specific issues. The county has over 300 recognised settlements, 21 of which have a population of 5,000 or more. This presents a challenge for the provision of transport and public services. A large proportion of the county, particularly to the west of the A68 is rural and has some of the sparsest population densities in the country. It is important to people that rural communities remain sustainable whilst maintaining those characteristics that make them distinctive. The particular challenges of rural communities are referenced throughout this Council Plan and rural proofing will be a major consideration in any policies that we develop.

¹ Based on the 2011 Rural and Urban Classification (RUC) for Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2017 Population Estimates

² Landscape interface between town and country / transition between urban and rural where urban and rural use clashes

Council Services



19,000 adults supported by social care



148 allotment sites



5 miles of records held in strong rooms



46 cemeteries and **98** closed church yards



2 crematorium joint committees



3,800 children supported by social care



Corporate parent to **912** children



15 leisure centres



8 swimming pools



757,000 sq ft commercial space managed



266 schools



11,274 children with special educational needs



5,000 food businesses inspected



15 sq. mi. of litter picking per week



8 major events organised



3,793km of highways



12,500 contacts to Housing Solutions p.a.



39 libraries



57,000 Council Tax Reduction claimants



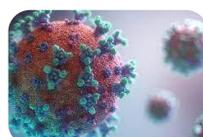
9 parks and **6** Green Flag Awards



82,000 street lights



£2.5m public transport subsidy grant



Over **10,000** people supported by our community hub



2,200 miles of public rights of way



Around **250,000** bins emptied every week

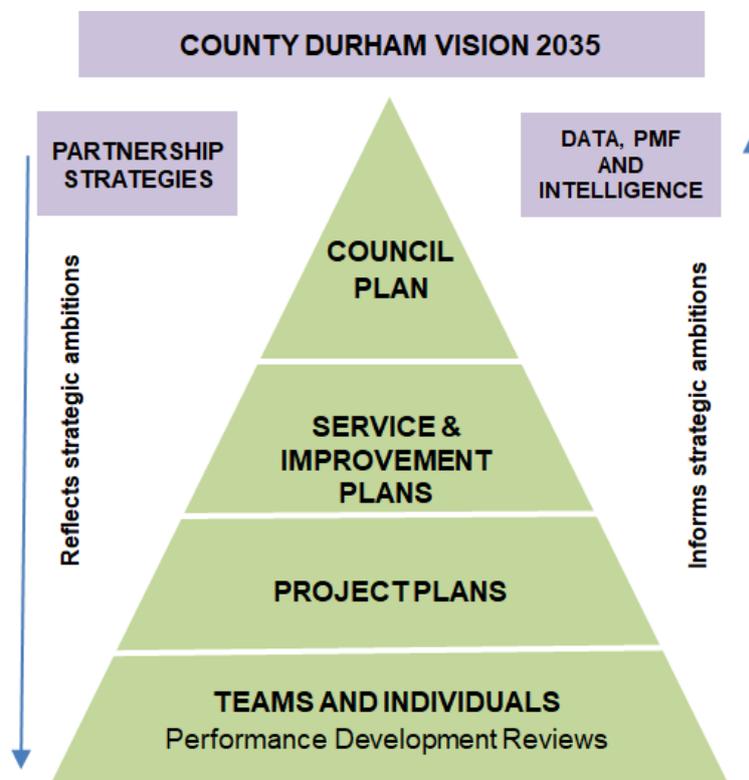
adult social care | allotments | archives | bereavement services | children's social care | commissioning
 community safety | consumer protection | culture and tourism | early years | economic development
 education | emergency planning | environmental health | environmental cleanliness | events | highways
 housing | homelessness | leisure services | libraries | local tax collection | parks | passenger transport
 picnic areas | planning applications | public health | registrars | rights of way | road safety | safeguarding |
 town centre regeneration | transport planning | traveller liaison | waste collection and disposal | welfare
 rights | winter maintenance | youth services

Our Planning Framework

Our planning framework runs a 'golden thread' through the organisation from high-level strategic plans, through service plans and ultimately to teams and individuals. It focuses our resources onto the things that matter to us and is supported by our performance management framework, through which we measure our progress.

- **County Durham Vision:** developed with partners and residents, sets out the shared long-term ambitions for the county.
- **Council Plan:** our key corporate planning document which sets out our direction for the medium-term. It shows how we will take forward the vision and sets out how we will make the council more efficient and fit for the future.
- **Service Plans** set out priorities for service groupings for the next three years and outline the key programmes we will undertake to deliver high-quality services, in line with available resources, which meet the needs and expectations of our service users and local communities.
- **Individuals' contribution** to delivering the corporate and service objectives.

All strategies and plans are monitored in line with our performance management framework.



What we want to achieve: Themes, Priorities and Objectives

OUR ECONOMY

Durham has a thriving and inclusive economy with more and better jobs and fewer people suffering from the hardships of poverty and deprivation

- Delivery of a range of employment sites across the county
- A strong, competitive economy where County Durham is a premier place in the North-East to live and do business
- A broader experience for residents and visitors to the county
- Young people will have access to good quality education, training and employment
- Helping all people into rewarding work
- Fewer people will be affected by poverty and deprivation within the county
- Work with others to mitigate impacts and harness any opportunities of exiting the European Union
- Assist businesses to restart and grow the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic
- We will improve employment opportunities for disabled people*

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Durham has taken action to tackle the climate emergency, reduce the impact of pollution and waste on our county and protect, restore and sustain our natural environment

- Create a physical environment that will contribute to good health
- Work with others to achieve a carbon neutral county
- Reduce the impact of waste and pollution on our environment
- Protect, restore and sustain our natural environment for the benefit of future generations

OUR PEOPLE

Durham is a place where people will enjoy fulfilling, long and independent lives

- Children and young people will enjoy the best start in life, good health and emotional wellbeing
- Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will achieve the best possible outcomes
- All children and young people will have a safe childhood
- Promotion of positive behaviours
- Better integration of health and social care services
- Tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities
- People will be supported to live independently for as long as possible by delivering more homes to meet the needs of older and disabled people

* These are Durham County Council's equality objectives. Further information can be found on our [website](#).

- Support people whose circumstances make them vulnerable
- Protect and improve the health of the local population, tackling leading causes of illness and death, including the local public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic

OUR COMMUNITIES

Durham is a great county in which to live, with flourishing communities which are connected and supportive of each other

- Standards will be maintained or improved across County Durham's housing stock
- Our towns and villages will be vibrant, well-used, clean, attractive and safe
- People will have good access to workplaces, services, retail and leisure opportunities
- Communities will be able to come together and support each other
- Delivery of new high-quality housing which is accessible and meets the needs of our residents
- Our rural communities will be sustainable whilst maintaining those characteristics which make them distinctive
- Provide additional support to community groups adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic
- Ensure that there is no unwarranted variation in opportunity and outcomes between our communities
- We will build inclusive communities*

OUR COUNCIL

Durham County Council has a reputation for listening to its residents, being well-managed and getting things done

- Our resources will be managed effectively
- Create a workforce for the future
- Design our services with service users
- Use data and technology more effectively
- We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture*

* These are Durham County Council's equality objectives. Further information can be found on our [website](#).

Our Vision

In October 2019, public, private and voluntary sector bodies which make up the County Durham Partnership jointly agreed a [Vision for County Durham 2035](#). This vision was based on a strategic assessment of need using our intelligence platform [Durham Insight](#) and was developed following extensive consultation with the public. Residents, businesses and specific interest groups such as children and young people and people with a disability, were asked what they would like to see in a new vision for the county and their views were incorporated into our final vision. The vision document which was agreed sets out our strategic direction and what we would like to achieve over the next 15 years and is written around three broad ambitions for the people of County Durham:

- **More and better jobs**
- **People live long and independent lives**
- **Connected communities**

These three themes were developed following extensive public consultation, with almost 30,000 pieces of consultation evidence having been fed into the development of the vision. As well as being of key importance to local people's long-term priorities, they remain key strategic ambitions in our response to the COVID-19 crisis, where key impacts relate to employment, health and wellbeing, and communities. This document sets out the contributions that Durham County Council will make to help achieve those ambitions.

For the purposes of our planning, we have supplemented this countywide vision with priorities around our environment and our council.

Our Economy: We want to build an inclusive economy by creating **more and better jobs**, ensuring no one is left behind by supporting businesses emerging from the pandemic back to stability and help to rebuild our economy. We are developing a pipeline of projects and investment plans; our roadmap to help stimulate inclusive economic recovery right across the county. We will create and nurture the major employment sites across the county, cementing our position as a premier place in the region to do business and building on the success of Jade Business Park, NetPark, Integra61, Milburngate and Forrest Park amongst others, with exciting opportunities for the development of Aykley Heads and the redevelopment of Front Street Stanley now in the pipeline. Employability support programmes will be developed to help people back into jobs or to start their own business. We will ensure that children and young people receive a high-quality education and training to equip them with the skills they need to access opportunities of today and the future. We will support our tourism and hospitality sector to recover as a great visitor destination with a cultural offer which will help stimulate the local economy. This will include our new Durham History Centre, which will open to the public in 2024, the reopening and re-purposing of the former DLI Museum and Art Gallery as a cultural venue and exhibition space, building on the success of Lumiere 2021 with an exciting festival and innovative cultural programme with a lasting legacy.

Our Environment: The climate emergency is one of the most important issues facing humankind today. Whilst it is a global issue, there is a lot that can be done locally to respond to this challenge. Durham County Council declared a climate emergency in 2019. Our target as an organisation is to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2030 through offsetting and further reducing emissions and contribute towards and work with others to achieve our aim of a carbon neutral county by 2045. On 6 April 2022, Cabinet declared an ecological emergency and agreed to progress the development of an action plan to address the ecological decline wherever possible.

Everyone is justifiably proud of our beautiful countryside and coast. A large part of the county is of significant landscape value including the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (also a designated UNESCO Global Geopark) and the Durham Heritage Coast. Some parts of our county support unique combinations of plant and animal species. Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are critical to our population. They play an important role in providing food, energy, shelter and medicines, sustaining water and soil quality, preventing floods and regulating the climate. Our natural environment also contributes significantly to our wellbeing and quality of life.

Our People: We want our residents to **live long and independent lives** and remain in good health for many years to come. We want to protect and improve the health of our residents, tackling leading causes of illness and early death, including the detection, prevention and response to infectious diseases. We want to tackle some of the inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including mental health challenges. We have a strong track record of health and social care integration in Durham. We want to build on the financial and practical support we have provided to the care sector during the pandemic by ensuring we have a high-quality care market that is sustainable in the future. The council has also set out an ambitious multi-million pound programme to transform our leisure centre venues to support health and wellbeing outcomes of the wider population and is developing a new physical activity strategy which aims to improve the physical health of our residents.

Our Communities: We want our **communities to be well connected and supportive of each other**. As town and village centres reopen, we will help them to be vibrant and accessible places which are well-used, clean, attractive and safe. We will support the most vulnerable in our communities, particularly those who are isolated or adversely affected financially. At the start of the pandemic, the council established community hubs to fast-track applications for food and other essential services to residents who had to remain in their own home and who had no support. We want to build on what we have learned during this time through an approach to supporting communities called County Durham Together, which will support our ongoing approach to wellbeing through working with communities, involving them in decisions that affect them, and building resilience and cohesion. This involves bringing a range of public sector and voluntary organisations together with communities to identify ambitions, and to develop and deliver plans as a partnership. We have a strong focus on tackling poverty, with significant investment and policy

interventions in place to support people who are financially vulnerable. Through our Poverty Action Steering Group and the work of the Advice in County Durham Partnership, we have developed a robust strategy and action plan to ensure there is support to those in crisis but that we also focus on the routes out of poverty.

Our Council: We want to be regarded as an excellent council, with effective governance arrangements and which has a good grip on its performance and finances. We want a workforce fit for the future and to make best use of the latest technology to provide an effective service for our residents. We recognise that we could make better use of data to better serve our residents and we plan to embark on a corporate programme to become a more analytical and data-driven organisation. We also want to be known as a council which listens to the views of our residents and service users and takes them into account in our decision-making.

Our Approach

Equality and inclusion are at the heart of the council’s vision and core values. We recognise that inequality affects different people and communities in different ways. We are committed to creating and sustaining a modern and supportive working environment for our employees and tackling the inequalities, prejudice and discrimination affecting the diverse communities which we serve.

We also want to work with communities to support their development and give them a greater degree of control over the factors and decisions which affect their lives. We acknowledge that communities have differing needs and we also recognise that they also have differing strengths and potential. One size does not fit all. We will therefore target our support towards the most in need and help to build capacity and resilience. We will work better together with other organisations to reduce duplication and ensure greater impact, and with service users and interested parties such as parents and carers to develop and shape services and initiatives. We are committed to doing things with communities rather than to them and we want to make sure that everything we do is supported by evidence and informed by conversations with our residents. This is known as our Approach to Wellbeing.



Our Financial Plan

The council is committed to strong financial governance and getting value for money, whilst ensuring that any council tax increases are justified and affordable. The first [annual budget and medium-term plan](#) for the council post the Elections in May 2021 seeks to balance the need for both short-term and long-term investment in frontline services, with the need for financial prudence and reasonable council tax increases.

In 2022/23, the council will receive additional core funding of £16.9 million from the Comprehensive Spending Review and the provisional Local Government Settlement. This will be vital in ensuring that significant ongoing budget pressures can be financed – which total approximately £45 million in 2022/23. Examples include the National Living Wage 6.6% uplift, energy costs which are forecast to increase in 2022 by over 40% and from the continuing pressures from higher demand in social care services, plus waste disposal and home to school transport budget pressures. The council's low tax base and consequential low tax raising capacity continues to constrain and place pressure on our budgets.

The government has published details of spending power 'per dwelling' for all local authorities, which shows that County Durham is now £156 (c7%) less than the England average. If Durham's Core Spending Power was brought up to the England authority average of £2,155 per dwelling, the council would annually receive additional government grant of £39 million.

Frontline services were fully protected in 2022/23 and the Council agreed to not increase the base Council Tax in 2022/23. Previously agreed savings of £1.227 million together with new additional corporate savings of £1.2 million were agreed for 2022/23, which provided £2.447 million of efficiencies to support the 2022/23 budget without the need to use any reserves to balance the budget.

Despite a very challenging financial period and the significant base budget pressures faced by the council, and largely because of the more favourable grant settlement the council received in 2022/23, the 2022/23 budget included some very positive outcomes for the people of County Durham, including:

- significant earmarked reserve investment of £10 million Durham City heritage assets, rural and urban footways, public rights of way and country parks;
- continued support to protect working age households in receipt of low incomes through the continuation of the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme, where they will continue to be entitled to up to 100% relief against their council tax payments and where those left with a bill will receive up to £150 of additional support next year;
- ongoing work with health partners to ensure that health and social care funds are maximised for the benefit of vulnerable people through the services we provide;
- significant investment in capital expenditure, including investment in school provision, in our town centres and infrastructure, new transport schemes and maintenance of our highways and pavements. In total, additional capital

investment of £119.9 million was agreed as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan, with the Council committed to a Capital Programme in excess of £600 million over the next three years – the most ambitious and significant level of investment the Council has ever agreed.

A key risk for the Council in 2022/23 and potentially beyond is the ongoing and potential long-term impact of Covid. There is no new Covid grant funding available in 2022/23 and whilst we have had to adjust our waste disposal budgets and include growth in that area in the 2022/23 budget, we simply do not know at this stage if and when income in places like this leisure centre will return to pre-pandemic levels.

Pay and price inflation is another significant concern. The 2022/23 budget includes significant additional budget uplifts in our energy budgets and prudent assumptions in terms of other inflationary pressures, but inflation, particularly energy inflation is increasing.

Monitoring

We will continue to monitor council performance against a comprehensive set of performance indicators to Cabinet and scrutiny committees on a quarterly basis. The plan will be subject to an annual review process.

Context: COVID-19 – Response, Restoration / Reset, Recovery

The council's approach to the COVID-19 pandemic is around response, restoration, reset and recovery. As a national emergency was declared in March 2020, a rapid response was required to support businesses and communities through the immediate crisis and communicated public health messages to the people of County Durham.

The principles by which we have managed our response, restoration, reset and recovery approach were:

1. Close surveillance and management of the COVID-19 pandemic in County Durham;
2. Being responsive to where we are in our journey to recovery;
3. Taking a dynamic response to control the virus and to support businesses and communities;
4. Working in partnership with other statutory agencies on our Local Resilience Forum to coordinate our efforts.

As lockdown measures were relaxed following rollout of the vaccination programme, there was an increase in the infection rate. Together with partners, we developed a COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan which set out how local outbreaks of the virus were identified and managed jointly by the council and the UK Health Security Agency's North-East Health Protection Team.

As the country has moved out of lockdown, the council has followed government guidelines and restored council services which were previously restricted or suspended, whilst at the same time reset some services to new smarter working adopted through the pandemic where possible and appropriate. Service restoration and the reopening of buildings has followed specific government guidance, a thorough assessment of risk and the introduction of necessary control measures to help protect the public and our employees. Innovative approaches to service provision which have either been developed in response to or enhanced because of the pandemic, such as online services, have been retained where they have transformed our offer and culture and reduced our environmental impact.

The pandemic has impacted on businesses. We have been closely monitoring the economic picture in the county and coordinating local, regional and national interventions to best support the business sector. Understanding the impact of the pandemic on our rural, urban and more deprived areas has been a core part of the council's recovery work and has informed the council's Poverty Action Plan and how related council services have responded. We will reshape our services to vulnerable groups such as older people and those suffering from poor mental health and those who are feeling lonely and isolated.

Priority: Our Economy

We will continue our economic renaissance and ensure that people can enjoy a thriving economy with **more and better jobs** and reduced levels of poverty and deprivation. We will build on our existing portfolio of businesses and will support the use of low carbon technologies and renewable energy. We will work with all schools, businesses and academies to ensure that the highest educational standards are in place to support a broad and balanced 21st century curriculum.

Our county has some of the most beautiful countryside and coastal landscapes in Britain, a fascinating history, a wealth of attractions and a regular events programme. We have made great strides to improve our tourist economy. Our aim is to have County Durham widely recognised as a leading centre for culture and the arts, with a range of experiences which match and exceed the best offered in the country.

Several of our villages were developed around collieries and homes which were built to house the population boom at the peak of coal production. Some of these communities have suffered a decline following the demise of these industries. We want to work with communities to address the underlying causes of deprivation and poverty.

Achievements

- Outstanding success in attracting countywide private and public investment in enterprise and tourism.
- £25 million invested on the Jade Enterprise Zone and junction.
- £178 million invested by Citrus on Integra 61 warehousing facility at Bowburn, including facilitating internet giant, Amazon and £5 million junction works.
- £271 million invested in one of Europe's leading technology parks at NETPark, Sedgefield delivered by Business Durham, with a £50m Phase 2 business plan agreed.
- £14 million invested at Forrest Park in Aycliffe preparing for further investment of over £140 million.
- £90 million spent in Barnard Castle by Glaxo Smith Kline on a new manufacturing facility.
- Almost £1.5 billion in Durham City, £750 million by the University and over £240 million on the Riverside and other projects.
- The first two phases of the development of the Aykley Heads strategic employment site have the potential to create 4,000 jobs with an estimated 1,800 jobs being supported in the construction of the park.
- £100 million invested through Project Genesis in Consett.
- £17 million spent at Beamish Museum on the 1950s town, upland farm and Georgian coaching inn.



- Lumiere, the biggest light festival in Europe, extended across County Durham as well as in Durham City for the first time this year, attracted an estimated 140,000 visitors.
- County Durham was one of only four locations that were been shortlisted to be UK City of Culture 2025.
- Succeeded in securing the first constituency Levelling Up bid for the Bishop Auckland Constituency
- Successful food festivals held at Bishop Auckland and Seaham.
- Our Post 16 outcomes have improved steadily over time with average grades at A level and Advanced General, above national averages from 2018.
- As of February 2022, 94.9% of 16-17-year-olds within County Durham are participating in education, employment or training, including 13.2% in employment.

Issues to address

- The employment rate has been maintained at 71.5% (September 2021) following a post-lockdown recovery but is below the national average.
- The lockdown has adversely affected both local businesses and residents financially.
- Businesses and individuals have relied on support arrangements put in place to limit financial impact, but these are only for the short-term and will be phased out.
- The ability of businesses to respond quickly to changes in demand may be limited in the short-term.
- 82,800 unique jobs were furloughed at some stage in the county representing over 40% of all employments. There is uncertainty around whether the ending of the scheme will lead to further unemployment.
- A weaker global economy will reduce export demand and disrupt international supply chains.
- Income levels are low in County Durham. The county is the 42nd most income-deprived out of 151 local authorities nationally. Gross disposable household income per head of population in County Durham is just over 75% of the national average.
- The gap between the employment rate for people with a disability compared with those who are not disabled stands at 34 percentage points (September 2021) which is one of the highest differences in the country.
- GCSE results as measured through the average attainment 8 score for the county are below the national average.
- As of October 2020, only 69% of secondary schools in County Durham are rated as good or outstanding.
- 1 in 4 of our school children are on free school meals as of January 2020, which is an indicator of the level of child poverty within the county.

- According to the latest figures (2018), an estimated 9.8% of households are in fuel poverty. This is defined as where the householder, after paying fuel costs, would be left with a disposable income which is below the poverty line.
- Day visitors to our county spend an average of £22.07 in the local economy per day, whilst overnight visitors will spend an average of £190.27 per trip. Only 8% of visitors will stop overnight within the county.
- Uncertainties around the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union remain.
 - Whilst key stage 4 league tables have not been produced since 2019, we know that COVID will have had a significant impact upon increasing the gap in achievement between our most disadvantaged pupils and their peers.
- Whilst the proportion of children attending good or better secondary or special schools is improving, our schools continue to require a network of support to accelerate progress.
- Indicators of child poverty have increased as a result of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Reducing the cost of the school day will become a greater priority in supporting full attendance strategies.

Council Contribution

To grow the economy, the council tries to create the conditions which will help the private and public sector invest in County Durham; allocating land, improving infrastructure and working with partners to attract investment and jobs.

We have committed to £49.6 million to progress the development of the third phase extension of NETPark (The North-East Technology Park) Business Park in Sedgfield and are currently procuring the developer, which could generate up to 1,250 skilled jobs and be worth up to £625 million to the County Durham economy.

To support delivery of Jade Business Park, we are continuing with the infrastructure improvements required to the A182 junction with the A19. This will improve capacity and cater for the increased predicted demand associated with the 600,000 square feet of business premises.

Through Business Durham we work with businesses to promote enterprise, foster the environment for new businesses to start up, and enable businesses in the county to develop and grow. Through the creation and delivery of high-profile innovation programmes, we help businesses develop new products, services and processes, win more investment and more contracts and employ more people.

The government's education white paper "Strong schools with Great Teachers for your Child" published on 28 March 2022 places a great emphasis on the Council being able to support the future direction of school organisation and the importance of 'Strong Trusts' to drive better outcomes. It clearly shows a shift from Local Authority responsibilities around school improvement and a move to a strategic role relating to vulnerable children and children missing from education. Alongside the considerable work that could be attached to new opportunities within the creation of Multi-Academy Trusts, the council will have additional duties around pupil place planning and attendance. Additionally, the SEND Green Paper ("right support, right place, right time") will require additional work with school leaders across the system to integrate more children with SEND into mainstream settings.

We have a substantial and varied property portfolio across County Durham, providing space for over 300 businesses employing 1,600 people, including offices, factories, the Durham Dales Centre and the region's only science park, NETPark.

To increase employment, we offer help and support to develop skills, get people into work or start their own business through such initiatives as Durham Employment and Skills, Employability Durham, Durham Enable and Durham Works. Employability Durham provides a range of schemes to those aged 25 and over who are unemployed and during 2020/21, supported 321 people into employment and 34 into education and training. Durham Works is a dedicated programme for young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training. During 2020/21, Durham Works supported 708 young people into education, employment or training. The council is itself a major employer committed to a comprehensive apprentice programme, open and fair recruitment and being a good employer. To improve our employment programmes for people with mental health issues or learning disabilities, we have recently employed three mental health employment support workers who will offer specialist support to those whose conditions may be a barrier to obtaining good jobs.

Our destination management organisation, Visit County Durham, works closely with VisitEngland, a wide range of public and private sector partners and tourism businesses to grow the county's visitor economy. Through Visit County Durham, we coordinate the promotion of the county nationally and internationally and influence or directly deliver activities which relate to visitors and the visitor economy, including marketing, information services, product development, visitor experience, business engagement and workforce development. Our Visitor Information Network is delivered through working with partners such as attractions, visitor centres and cafes to provide information, literature, kiosks and touchscreens - and in the most recent survey received a 93% customer satisfaction rating.

As part of the Culture Durham Partnership, we have entered a bid to be UK City of Culture 2025. Whilst we were ultimately unsuccessful, we were shortlisted to the final four. We still aim to deliver a cultural programme which we hope will bring social and economic benefits to the whole of County Durham and the wider region; allowing us to engage even more people in arts and

culture, attract additional visitors and help us to secure additional investment. As part of our contribution to the cultural offer within County Durham, we run an annual programme of festivals and events including Bishop Auckland and Seaham Food Festivals, Durham Brass and Durham Book Festival, alongside a varied offer of exhibitions and entertainment through our town halls and theatres.

To support businesses throughout the pandemic, the council has paid £203 million in covid-related business grants to date. This includes almost £100 million of Restart Grant which was paid to 4,271 businesses, more than £51 million of Local Restrictions Support Grant to 4,210 businesses, £17 million of Additional Restriction Grant, and nearly £5 million of Local Authority Discretionary Grant to 1,071 businesses.

Approach

The national restrictions introduced as part of the COVID-19 pandemic led to temporary business closures and employees being furloughed. Priorities for the council were to protect businesses and jobs and to alleviate financial hardship suffered by our residents. The council introduced a range of measures to support local businesses throughout the crisis and ease the pressure on residents suffering financial hardship.

We developed a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan to help support businesses being released from lockdown, manage the transition to stabilisation and to rebuild and grow our economy. We have developed a pipeline of projects which will serve as a roadmap to recovery and deliver investment plans to help rebuild our economy.

We recognise that there may be job losses and that these are anticipated to affect older people and the lower paid, which disproportionately affects some groups more than others. We will monitor changes in employment throughout the county and develop and deliver employability support programmes to help those who have lost their jobs back into employment.

Increasing employment in the county has a significant multiplier effect in terms of its contribution to a range of other quality of life issues, such as improving mental and physical health and reducing crime. We are working to support employers and voluntary and community organisations to address health issues in the workplace through a range of initiatives. Our ambition is to create more jobs for our residents. Wage levels in the county lag behind the national average and the gap is widening. We need to address this by attracting high-quality jobs to the area. We want to create the ideal environment for businesses to thrive in the county, through ensuring that our workforce and our young people entering the jobs market are equipped with the necessary skills to access the jobs of today and the future. The pipeline of investment projects in the county has never been so high and we want to build on this

by further developing our strategic employment sites and supporting key employment sectors. We will continue to deliver a range of programmes to help people, who are finding it difficult to access the jobs market, into rewarding work including reskilling our labour force. Our plans will support rural growth whilst preserving the quality of what makes these areas distinctive. Our county has a rich historic and cultural heritage, some enviable world-class attractions and beautiful countryside. We want to continue to develop the visitor economy for County Durham. The historic collapse of heavy industry and the impact that this has had on residents and communities is apparent when we look at some of our communities, which have some of the worst indicators of deprivation in the country. We want to address the gaps in inequality across our county and make sure that no one is left behind and that the benefits of a resurgent economy can be enjoyed by all residents.

Major Projects

- 2022
- **Complete the review of the** plans to occupy the newly constructed building on The Sands in Durham City and developed revised proposals for the location of the council's Headquarters (HQ) functions and use of its estate to support wider economic objectives for the county should the council not occupy The Sands site
 - **Facilitate development of Aykley Heads as a prestigious strategic employment site through the demolition of County Hall.**
 - **Assure the delivery of the Milburngate redevelopment project in Durham**
includes a 92-bed hotel, 153 luxury apartments, a boutique cinema, 60,000 square feet of leisure space and 53,000 square feet of premium office space
 - Align our Inclusion Strategy with the findings of the SEND Green Paper (*Right Support, Right Place, Right Time*)
 - Develop our response to the Education White Paper *Strong schools with great teachers for your child*, including the development of an Education Strategy
 - Focus on closing the gap in employment opportunities for those with a long-term health condition or disability, through the development of supported employment and the rollout of a pilot with learning disability day services to support people into volunteering and employment
 - Increase the number of businesses in the county achieving the North East Better Health at Work Award
 - Increase the number of organisations involved in career development related to mental health

- Improve access to high-quality and impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance in schools and further education settings to ensure that young people are clear about progression pathways, including apprenticeship opportunities
- Through commissioned services, write into every contract that providers will commit to improving the health and wellbeing of their workforce, either through 'Thriving at Work' standards or by achieving the Better Health at Work Award
- Increase income levels for the most vulnerable, through greater awareness of and access to benefit eligibility
- Undertake the 'big econ-versation' to seek views from residents, business people and other stakeholders so people can have their say on economic issues and develop an Inclusive Economic Strategy for County Durham which integrates with national, regional, sub-regional and local strategies

2023

- **Develop key locations for business**
including Aykley Heads, Forrest Park, Jade Enterprise Zone
- **Continue to explore and pursue options for devolution for County Durham**
- **Refurbish and reopen the former DLI Museum and Art Gallery and grounds as an exhibition centre, gallery and café venue with appropriate reflective and contemplative grounds**
- Develop and deliver pipeline of major transport infrastructure projects to support employment sites
- Deliver sites within Business Durham remit and enhance Business Durham Property Portfolio
including NETPark Phase 3, Merchant Park, Jade Business Park and South Church Enterprise Park
- Support business to achieve growth through the County Durham Growth Fund, Finance Durham, Business Durham key account management programme and enterprise and start-up offers
- Develop the 'Better Business for All' initiative to help reduce the burden of regulation on local businesses, including support following the exit of the UK from the European Union and COVID-19
- Assess and address the economic implications of the pandemic and provide assistance to business needs, to restart and grow the economy in County Durham
- Support the delivery of a new visitor offer across County Durham
- Review the County Durham Tourism Management Plan
- Review the programme of events and festivals and prepare for lottery submissions for 2022-2026

- To strengthen school provision across the county by the creation of appropriate professional support networks for all schools. These will bring together the best practice and pedagogy from all of our schools regardless of ownership or designation.
- Work with schools and trusts to increase the quality of teaching and professional development so that we have fewer issues around recruitment and retention in core curriculum areas.
- To review and support school reorganisation where it is necessary to maintain and strengthen the quality of education, breadth of curriculum and financial sustainability necessary to preserve school places.
- Support our schools and settings to provide targeted support for every child who needs it to complement great teaching and a strong curriculum.
- Support more young people with vulnerable characteristics into employment, including young people who are looked after, care leavers, young people who have SEND and young people supervised by the Youth Justice Service
- Support care leavers to achieve good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships
- Continuously review school organisation and the education estate across the county and develop options to help strengthen school provision, especially in areas where unsustainable financial issues are being experienced
- Deliver a range of initiatives to alleviate fuel poverty

2024 ▪ Deliver employability programmes which help people access and sustain regular employment

2026 ▪ **Bring together the history and heritage of the county into the Durham History Centre**

Key Performance Indicators

- £8.2 million of new contracts secured (£8 million)
- Eight Inward Investments secured
- 95% of Business Durham floor space is occupied (85%)
- Increase employment land approved and delivered by 300 hectares by 2035 (against 2016 baseline)
- Narrow the gap between the number of private sector business and private sector employments per 10,000 head of population within County Durham and England and aim to bring them in line with the national average by 2035
- Increase the % of County Durham residents who can access employment sites by public transport (against 2021 baseline)

- Increase the level of GVA per filled job in line with national levels by 2035
- Increase the employment rate for 16-64-year-olds in line with national levels by 2035
- Increase the proportion of residents with higher level skills in line with national levels by 2035
- Increase the number of organisations involved in the Better Health at Work Award (to improve health and wellbeing interventions at work)
- Increase the proportion of young people in education, employment and training to be consistently higher than regional and national levels
- Increase percentage of 16–17-year-olds in an apprenticeship
- Increase the overall disability employment rate / close the gap
- Attract 11.96 million visitors to the county in 2021 (5% increase on 2020)
- Increase the proportion of visitor attractions which are served by public transport (against 2021 baseline)
- Percentage uptake of Free Early Education Entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds
- Reduce the number of heritage assets ‘at risk’ that are categorised as ‘Priority A and/or in ‘very bad condition’ (against 2021 baseline)
- Improve the proportion of children achieving expected standards in maths and reading at key stage 2 in line with 2030 ambitions
- Improve the average grade of achievement of all of our pupils within GCSE English and Maths to a Grade 5 (In line with 2030 ambitions)
- Improve the educational attainment of our most disadvantaged cohorts to meet basic threshold measures in English and mathematics which will improve their access to further education and high-quality jobs with training.

Priority: Our Environment

One of the biggest issues facing the planet is the climate emergency. Scientific evidence shows that we are experiencing unsustainable increasing temperatures from greenhouse gases caused by human activity, through the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, intensive livestock farming and other industrial practices. Whilst this is a global issue, there is a lot that can be done locally. Durham County Council has declared a climate emergency and is looking to reduce carbon emissions from its own operations and change some of its land practices such as peat restoration and tree planting.



The council wants to provide the right conditions to make cycling and walking for short journeys, or as part of a longer journey, the right choice. This will not only reduce carbon emissions but also has added health benefits for our residents. Levels of pollutants are low in the county but there are some hot spots where government standards are exceeded at certain times, and we have a plan to reduce these.

We have some beautiful countryside in County Durham boasting an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a UNESCO designated Geopark, a heritage coast and many Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There are many benefits to valuing nature, and we need to conserve and sustain this for future generations and not allow our biodiversity to deteriorate.

Durham is a large and diverse county with a very dispersed settlement pattern which creates specific issues. A large proportion of the county, particularly to the west of the A68, is rural and has some of the sparsest population densities in the country. It is important that rural communities remain sustainable whilst maintaining those characteristics which make them distinctive. The particular challenges of rural communities are referenced throughout this Council Plan and rural proofing will be a major consideration in any policies we develop.

Achievements

- Over 60% of our domestic waste was going to landfill in 2008. This has been reduced to 5% following the introduction of new waste collection and disposal arrangements.
- Tonnage of carbon emissions from council operations has been reduced by 58% since 2008-09.
- Carbon emissions across the county have reduced by 54% from the 1990 baseline.
- The council has worked to eliminate single use plastics from all its operations, encouraging over 300 individuals and organisations to sign up to our plastics pledge and work to eradicate unnecessary plastics from their business.

Issues to address

- Durham County Council declared a climate emergency in 2019. Our targets are achieve net zero as an organisation by 2030 (from a 2008/09 baseline) through offsetting and further reductions in emissions and to contribute towards and work with others to achieve a carbon neutral county by 2045.
- The council is committed to exploring more sustainable transport choices and has lobbied MPs and the government for the reopening of the Leamside line to help realise environmental, social and economic benefits in County Durham and the wider region.
- Countywide contracts in place for waste disposal services are coming to an end.
- Air Quality Management Areas where national standards for levels of pollutants have been declared in parts of Durham City and Chester-le-Street, each with an action plan to improve air quality.
- The Environment Act 2021 will give the council more powers and responsibilities regarding air quality, nature conservation, waste and use of resources.
- The council is committed to examining the decline of habitats and species has declared an ecological emergency in County Durham.
- We want to encourage and enable greater participation in cycling and walking across all demographic groups.
- The government's Waste and Resources Strategy may have implications for the council such as the introduction of a separate food waste collection, free garden waste collection services, standardising domestic collection services across the country and introducing recycling targets.
- We will continue to work with our partners, Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency to carry out work to reduce the risk of flooding and its impacts on residents and businesses.
- The tonnage of domestic household waste collected has increased significantly during the pandemic, which is affecting the proportion of waste recycled and being diverted to landfill and increased contamination issues in our recycling collections.
- The percentage of waste going to landfill has increased during the pandemic from less than 5% to nearly 10%.

Council Contribution

In 2020/21, 3% of the overall carbon emissions of County Durham, equating to 44,913 tonnes of carbon, originated from the council's operations: 46% from heating, 32% from electricity and 22% from transport. We continue to examine carbon emissions arising from our operational infrastructure, fleet, land use and behaviours and consider the climate emergency in all our decisions to further reduce our environmental impact.

The council owns approximately 10% of the county's total woodland - 1,800 hectares across 170 sites, of which over 300 hectares is ancient woodland which has existed since 1600. We are also the accountable body for the management of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area covering almost 2,000 square kilometres and containing 40% of the UK's upland hay meadows, 30% of upland heath and 27% of blanket bog. Appropriate management of these sites will not only improve their carbon performance and their role in tackling climate change, but it will also increase their amenity value, benefit wildlife conservation and other ecosystem services.

Responsible for the collection, disposal, and treatment of all municipal solid waste within its area, the council has a major role to play in tackling waste. Our in-house teams carry out regular and reliable collection services to around 250,000 households and 3,200 businesses, as well as providing 12 fixed and one mobile Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

In addition to the scheduled services during 2020/21, we completed 28,000 bulky household waste collections, regular clinical waste collections from 653 residents and cleared up 6,560 fly-tips. Our work amassed 243,492 tonnes of domestic waste, 8,057 tonnes of trade waste and 1,743 tonnes of fly-tipped waste. 92% was diverted from landfill - most was converted to energy but 37% was re-used, recycled or composted. Although COVID-19 forced the temporary closure of our HWRCs, there was significant demand when they re-opened in May 2020, with 48,516 tonnes of waste collected during the remainder of 2020/21, 67% of which was re-used, recycled or composted.

Approach

The council declared a climate emergency for County Durham in 2019 and has developed two fully costed action plans, one for the council's carbon reduction target and another for the countywide target. The council is investing in renewable energy such as a solar farm at Tanfield Lea to provide power for our data centre and we are exploring the potential for mine-water heat at the Louisa Centre in Stanley. New council buildings are being built to high energy efficiency standards, with charging points for electric vehicles. Existing buildings are being retrofitted with more efficient heating systems, better insulation and low energy LED lighting.

We have been upgrading our streetlights with new LED light fittings. We are replacing all our pool cars with electric vehicles and have plans for the electrification of our service fleet. We have a substantial programme of tree planting planned. We also continue to provide support to businesses with their carbon footprint through the Business Energy Efficiency Project and have set up a community investment fund to assist community groups in reducing their carbon impact. COVID-19 has accelerated the introduction of smarter working and things like online meetings, video conferencing and transacting business remotely have reduced the need for officer travel. We also have a programme to install more vehicle charging points in locations across the county.

We have developed a strategic cycling and walking delivery plan and continue to invest in improvements to our cycling and walking infrastructure, to make it easier for residents to cycle and walk for everyday journeys and also improve their health and wellbeing.

The county boasts some beautiful countryside. The North Pennine uplands and the Durham Coast and associated Magnesian Limestone grasslands, in particular, support rare and threatened species and both have been the subject of considerable conservation effort. We have declared an ecological emergency and will be developing an action plan to help tackle this decline.

As we approach the contract end date for our waste disposal services, we are looking at a multi-authority waste treatment procurement. We will also need to consider the impact of new duties under the Environment Act 2021, the national resources and waste strategy and the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on our domestic waste collection service.

Major Projects

- 2022
- Manage the council's tree and woodland resource
 - Develop policies and plans to tackle the ecological emergency within County Durham
 - Review the Climate Change Emergency Response Plan and the Councils Carbon Reduction Targets / ambitions
 - Develop a countywide offer around physical activity and good nutrition, specifically targeting vulnerable communities
 - Implement the local Air Quality Action Plan and improve air quality within Durham City to meet the standards set within the National Air Quality Strategy
 - Review our local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Surface Water Management Plan and deliver flood prevention schemes
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- 2023
- **Implement our Climate Emergency Response Plan**
 - Delivery of transport infrastructure projects to encourage more sustainable transport choices

- Implement the Investors in Environment Standard
 - Respond to the Government's Resource and Waste Strategy (RaWS) for England 2018 proposals and prepare for future policy and legislation changes
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- 2025
- Development and delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)
 - Development of the Nature Recovery Network Strategy for County Durham in partnership with the Environment and Climate Change Partnership Ecological Emergency workstream
- 2026
- Support and deliver Local Nature and Landscape Partnership programmes including Land of Oak and Iron Legacy; Seascapes; Durham Woodland Revival; Brightwater; North East Community Forest; Heritage Coast and Planting new trees and woodland
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Key Performance Indicators

- Increase the proportion of waste diverted from landfill to at least 95%
- County Durham to become carbon neutral
- Raise cycling and walking levels in County Durham in line with national levels by 2035
- Work towards Durham City Air Quality Management Area NO₂ levels being below the government threshold of 40µg/m³
- Plant a minimum of 140,000 trees by 2024

Priority: Our People

Good health is central to people's happiness and has a significant impact on demand for services. Health is determined by several factors including the community we live in, access to a good natural and built environment, high-quality education and jobs and our network of friends and family. Both life expectancy and the number of years a person remains in good health are lower in County Durham than in other parts of the country. The proportion of people with long-term limiting conditions is also higher than national levels. An ageing society will create different demands for products and services, including new care technologies and housing models. Central to our plans is to provide a more joined-up service for health and social care. We also want to do everything we can with partner organisations to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our residents and prevent mental illness and suicide. We want all people to lead independent and fulfilling lives and continue to contribute to society. Within a changing education climate, it is essential that the council maintains a strong collaborative partnership with its schools and settings to enhance the learning opportunities for all children.



Achievements

- Teenage pregnancies have halved over the last 10 years.
- We have helped 3,000 people to access support for drug and alcohol issues and are now above the national average for those successfully completing treatment.
- Effective discharge planning and joint working between health and social care services means that County Durham is one of the best performing areas in the country regarding delayed transfers of care from hospital.
- We have excellent levels of satisfaction from clients in receipt of adult social care services compared to national figures.
- We have developed a public health driven planning policy to address the proliferation in hot food takeaways that is contributing towards levels of obesity in children and adults.
- To date (Dec 2021), since 2015 we have achieved significant and sustained outcomes with 5,851 families through our Stronger Families Programme.
- Durham County Council was highly commended in the Municipal Journal Digital Transformation Award for 2021, which recognised the introduction of the Health Call Digital Care Home system, allowing care workers to digitally share the results of their resident observations, such as blood pressure and heart rates, with health professionals.
- 100% of our maintained nursery education providers are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- Durham County Council won the Local Government Chronicle Children's Services Award for 2021 for our Supporting Solutions Service, which works with children on the edge of care to enable them to stay with their families and avoid entering the care system.

- Strong adoption performance
- Positive feedback from Ofsted focused visit on the quality of services for children in care
- Strong local offer for our care leavers which was confirmed by young people responding to a national benchmarking exercise. We have also opened the new care leavers hub.
- The council has developed County Durham Care Academy for both its existing and potential workforce offering a range

Issues to address

- The impact of the pandemic is a factor that has led to male life expectancy falling by seven months and female life expectancy by six months.
- Smoking prevalence has increased from 15% to 17%.
- Sustainability of a diverse care sector.
- The risk of a new variant of COVID-19 or an outbreak of another infectious disease, which will have major health impacts on vulnerable people and possibly result in the introduction of health restrictions.
- Life expectancy at birth is 1.6 years lower for males and 1.9 years for females in County Durham compared with the average for England.
- Healthy life expectancy, the number of years a person lives in good health, is around five years lower than national figures and there is a 10-year difference in healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived communities in County Durham.

of courses from entry level right through to senior leadership and management qualifications.

- Established a Local Tracing Partnership, County Durham Together Hub and an Outbreak Management Team to protect our residents, provide community support and reduce COVID-19 transmission.
 - Won the CYP Now award for Youth Justice Services
- A quarter of the population in the county will be aged 65+ by 2032.
 - One in four children are overweight in reception year, rising to over one in three at Year 6 and to two in three in adulthood. These figures are above national levels.
 - Levels of women who are still smoking in pregnancy in County Durham is significantly higher than the national average.
 - Breastfeeding prevalence rates amongst new mothers remain nearly 19 percentage points behind national figures.
 - Increased responsibilities, changing needs and reducing government funding are placing greater pressure on our ability to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
 - Mental health is a priority. Indicators are high for hospital admissions for self-harm, suicide rates and patients registered with depression.

- We need to diversify the range of older persons' housing provision to meet growing demand from an ageing population and free up larger family accommodation.
- The numbers of children requiring the support of a social worker due to complex needs, which have increased during COVID-19.
- Ensuring sufficient local placement choice for our Children in Care.
- The increasing numbers and complexity of children with SEND requiring wider support.
- An increase in the complexity of care and court of protection referrals.

Council Contribution

The council has made significant investments to help vulnerable households impacted by the pandemic, including £62 million through our Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) which supports more than 56,000 residents (37% of whom are pensioners), £14 million through LCTRS top up payments, £1.2 million through Discretionary Housing Payments which off-set shortfalls in housing rental costs, £1 million through our Welfare Assistance Scheme which helps people in crisis with daily living expenses and £170,000 exempting care leavers under 25 from paying council tax.

Annual grants have been set up for the Durham Foodbank (£50,000) and the East Durham Trust (£2,700) and other initiatives which off-set food poverty in 2020/21 included 295 hampers for the most vulnerable families, 273 food vouchers worth £80 for care leavers, 600 food vouchers worth £80 for kinship carers, and more than 101,100 vouchers, worth £20 per child per week and covering school holiday periods, for more than 21,000 0–19-year-olds.

Our welfare teams supported 59,053 residents claiming Council Tax Reduction (CTR) and/or Housing Benefit (HB). During 2020/21, we processed almost 2,500 new HB claims and 17,200 new CTR claims in an average time of 16.9 and 19.7 days respectively. In addition, over the same period, we processed almost 217,000 changes of circumstance in an average time of 4.7 days. We also processed more than 3,000 Discretionary Housing Payments (averaging £669 each), more than 6,000 Daily Living Expenses grants (averaging £91) and Settlement Grants (averaging £493) totalling over £1.5 million.

COVID-19 significantly impacted the collection of council tax during 2020/21. However, by September 2021, we had collected £10.5 million more than in the same period the previous year. Following a year of inhibited recovery action, statutory collection was reinstated on a gradual and cautious basis and, whilst there are still some legal and enforcement limitations in place, flexible and supportive options continue to be offered to our residents and businesses.

The council is continuing to encourage all residents to make healthy lifestyle choices. We own 148 allotment sites across the county which 3,500 people use to grow their own food, reaping the associated benefits to their physical and mental health. Our 15 leisure centres offer a range of facilities which promote physical activity, and across these centres, we have 16,084 gym members, 4,044 aqualearn members and 1,359 swim-only members. Across our communities, we continue to offer free walking, running and cycling activities. From April 2021 to December 2021, there were 5,417 attendances for our Walk Durham wellbeing walks programme, and 163 people joined one of our Run Durham 'get into running' courses. We also provide a wide range of inclusive and accessible community-based wellbeing activities and, from July to December 2021, we delivered 191 sessions with 922 attendances. We are also continuing to work with schools through the Active 30 Durham programme, with 108 signed up.

The council also supports service users and carers across a range of services, helping people with their mental health and wellbeing, physical disability, sensory impairment and learning disabilities. At any one time, the council supports around 18,000 adults and 3,900 children through its social care functions and there are around 950 children in care and 450 children on a child protection plan. The council also supports a further 1,500 in early help services, as well as over 14,000 children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities

In 2020/21, Adult and Health Services received 25,330 requests for social care support, 3,940 safeguarding incidents were reported, services were provided to 5,070 carers and 12,200 people received long-term care services, while 1,400 people received short-term rehabilitation services.

Approach

A critical issue for the lifetime of this plan is to address the underlying factors that contribute to the issues outlined above, and to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects it has had on our communities and residents. We want to develop our County Durham Together Partnership, to promote and enable easier access to preventative services available in local communities, which brings together a range of public sector and voluntary agencies together with communities to identify ambitions, and to develop and deliver plans together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to challenges regarding sustainability within the care home sector. We also need to review the approach to care home commissioning, taking into account changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of ensuring a sustainable and high-quality care market.

The county has a legacy of heavy industry and suffers from poor health across a range of measures. We intend to tackle this inequality through a number of programmes across the life course. We aim to support mothers to address tobacco dependency in pregnancy and increase breastfeeding initiation for new-born babies. We will implement a range of measures to tackle oral health inequality in children across the county and improve health protection by increasing take-up of vaccinations in adults and children. We have a range of measures to support children with special educational needs and disabilities to achieve the best possible outcomes.

We will promote positive behaviours through becoming a smoke-free county and reducing dependency on, and deaths caused by, drug and alcohol addiction. We want to improve the mental health of young and old alike and tackle the stigma of mental health. We will provide a more integrated health and social care model and both specialist housing and assistive technologies for older and disabled people, to allow people to live more independent lives into their old age.

Major Projects

- 2022
 - Reduce unintentional injuries in the 0-19 population, through the County Durham Prevention of Unintentional Injuries Framework
 - Implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy and the High Needs Block Sustainability Plan 2022-23.
 - Further embedding of Signs of Safety as the practice model for children's social care services.
 - Implementation of the Councils Sufficiency Strategy over the next 4-5 years.
 - Significant investment in the children's social care workforce to support a highly skilled and stable workforce
 - Development of a Collaborative Care Model with colleagues from mental health trust including the development of a new integrated rapid response service to support young people with complex mental health needs
 - Enhancing joint working across Social Care, Education services and schools to support increased attendance at school with a focus on those children who are most vulnerable
 - Developmental work to support improved integration of health and social care services for children and young people
 - Work with a range of partners to increase physical activity by promoting Active 30 in schools
 - Deliver Making Every Contact Count training to staff, enabling every contact to be a health contact

- Further develop the Trusted Assessor model to facilitate smooth transfers of care between primary and social care and improve service users' and carers' experiences of these services
- Complete a sector-led improvement peer review on drug-related deaths, to inform service delivery
- Support providers through the changing, complex health and social care system to ensure that they are equipped to deliver the volume and standards of care required
- Change our social care model and ensure that people have access to robust advice and information, to enable them to live healthy and independent lives in their community and to prevent delaying the need for formal service provision
- Develop the Personal Assistants market for direct payment users

2023

- **Review the approach to care home commissioning, taking into account changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of ensuring a sustainable and high-quality care market**
- **Work in partnership with external providers to develop and shape the market, to ensure that the most appropriate, local and value for money placements are available which meet the needs of our children and young people who are looked after**
- Develop a sexual health strategy for County Durham, to ensure equitable access to services and focus on good contraceptive health
- Improve health protection for children and young people and reduce inequality by increasing immunisation levels (for example, flu vaccine uptake)
- Introduce a healthy schools programme and health standards into early years and schools
- Consider a range of population approaches to improve children's oral health
- Improve mental health support for children and young people through the implementation of the Mental Health, Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience Local Transformation Plan
- Support women to achieve a smoke-free pregnancy through whole system change and tackling tobacco dependency in pregnancy as an addiction, not a lifestyle choice
- Increase the percentage of women who initiate breastfeeding and continue at 6-8 weeks, through the County Durham 'Call to Action', to change the culture of breastfeeding in the county

- Increase speech, language and communication skills in the early years, to ensure that children are ready to learn at two and ready for school at five, by improving access to local speech enrichment services across each locality, according to identified need
- To support the ambition to reduce smoking in County Durham to 5% by 2025, ensure that the redesigned Stop Smoking Service is effectively reaching people in our local communities
- Encourage people to reduce the amount of alcohol they drink, through targeted campaigns for council staff and our local communities and by promoting and supporting Dry January and National Alcohol Awareness Week
- Implement an Integrated Strategic Commissioning Function for the county, to ensure more effective management of resources, joint contract monitoring and improved quality of service provision
- Deliver homes to meet the needs of older people within our communities and support people to live independently for as long as possible
- Work with partners and providers to reduce the incidence of falls and fractures in older people, through training and assistive / digital technologies
- Provide equipment to support reablement, progression and sustainable outcomes, including community equipment and provision in care homes
- Identify gaps across the county regarding communities yet to become dementia-friendly and provide support to help them achieve dementia-friendly status
- Engage with stakeholders to develop, test and deliver future provider / partner / service user portals for better information-sharing and to streamline processes
- Deliver our Children's Social Care Improvement Plan, to ensure that we provide good and outstanding social care services to children, young people and their families who need social care support
- Continue to recruit, develop and support a skilled, experienced and confident social care workforce
- Continue to promote the role and responsibility of the council as a corporate parent, ensuring that we are committed and ambitious for all of our children in care and care leavers
- Continue to implement Councils Sufficiency Strategy and plans to increase foster carer and children's homes capacity.
- Development of a contextualised safeguarding framework to reduce the risk of harm for Durham's young people

- Development of strategies to support children to remain safely at home with their families and prevent them coming into the care of the Council
 - Target our resources on those young people committing the most offences
 - Put victims, especially young victims, and restorative justice at the heart of everything we do
 - Deliver initiatives that support rough sleepers, ex-offenders and other vulnerable people into accommodation
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Key Performance Indicators

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieving a Good Level of Development
- Percentage of our children and young people attending an Ofsted judged 'Good or Better' school
- Number of Children Looked After per 10,000 population
- Number of Children in Need per 10,000 Population
- Percentage of Children Looked After placed within 20 miles of their homes address
- 15% of mothers smoking at time of delivery (14.7%).
- Number of Families on our Stronger Families Programme attaining significant and sustained outcomes
 - Create a smoke-free environment, with over 95% of residents not smoking (national target by 2025) and with the aim that pregnant women and mothers will not smoke
 - Reduce the gap in breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks between County Durham and the national average
 - Increase the percentage of children aged 4-5 who are of a healthy weight to over 90% and those aged 10-11 to 79% by 2025
 - 10,000 more adults undertake 150 minute of at least moderate intensity physical activity per week (against 2015 baseline)
 - 15,000 less adults are inactive (undertake less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week) (against 2015 baseline)
 - Number of Children and Young People with an Education, Health and Care Plan
 - Improve healthy life expectancy and reduce the gap within County Durham and between County Durham and England
 - Improved mental health and wellbeing evidenced by improved self-reported wellbeing scores and reduced suicide rates
 - Number of admissions under the Mental Health Act

- Increase satisfaction rates with people's experience of care
- Percentage of older people who were still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement / rehabilitation services / percentage hospital discharges receiving reablement
- Increased healthy life expectancy at 65
- Deliver at least 600 homes suitable for older persons by 2035
- Increase the number of homes approved, which meet accessible and adaptable standards, by 5,613 by 2035
- Increase the average age whereby people are able to remain living independently in their own home
- Increase the percentage of people aged 65+ with aids and assistive technologies in their homes

Priority: Our Communities

Our residents are rightly proud of their county. We want to have caring and welcoming communities, where everyone is valued and can help and support each other. We want a county which gives everyone the opportunity to realise their potential.

People want a range and choice of housing which is accessible, well-designed and meets their future needs. Our high streets and town centres retain an important place in our society, but they need to adapt to ensure that they remain vibrant, safe and attractive social hubs people want to use.

People also expect local travel to be convenient, with good quality direct links between centres of population, to employment locations such as business parks and leisure opportunities. Communities therefore need to be connected by appropriate transport and technological infrastructures.

Achievements

- The council leads on Digital Durham, a £35 million initiative to transform broadband speeds for residents and business across the North-East – and has already provided access to fibre broadband to over 105,000 properties.
- Significant investment in increasing workforce capacity, both at a managerial and social worker level, and effective workforce planning has led to reduced caseloads, sustained low levels of staff vacancy and turnover rates, better quality and timeliness in children’s social care.
- Investment in a new IT system has transformed children’s social care performance information, and management oversight has improved compliance in most areas of performance.
- A new adult social care system has recently been implemented.
- Since 2016, the council in collaboration with a range of partner organisations, has played its part in the UK’s commitment to support some of the world’s most vulnerable refugees and has been recognised nationally as best practice for its resettlement programme.
- Roll out of programmes and training to support increased awareness of mental health issues by staff and schools.
- A local lettings agency has been established to help secure suitable housing for homeless people and people who find it difficult to access the housing market.
- Durham County Council is one of only two local authorities in the country to achieve the maximum under the



Department for Transport's incentive fund in recognition of its efficiency rating and has managed to prioritise and increase investment in its highways.

- Each year, the council invests £3.7 million on town centre regeneration, purchasing derelict buildings and land and environmental improvements.
- Over the last 10 years, our Area Action Partnerships have completed over 7,000 community projects, benefiting over 30,000 people and helping to secure over £100 million funding.

Issues to address

- There has been increased demand for services provided by voluntary and community sector organisations, just as the sector loses a significant proportion of its revenue.
- County Durham follows the national trend in seeing large increases in demand for and complexity of children's social care
- Low house prices have resulted in a high proportion of privately rented accommodation in the county and a need for greater regulation to ensure more consistent standards.
- The national issue of high street decline, with the growth of online shopping and major retailers closing stores, has affected our town centres.
- Internet sales as a percentage of total retail sales have risen nationally, from 2.5% in December 2006 to 26.3% in October 2021, posing increasing competition to high street shops and leading to major changes in our high streets and town centres.
- The highly dispersed settlement pattern in County Durham with over 300 recognised settlements, 21 of which have a population of 5,000 or more, presents a challenge for the provision of transport and public services, particularly in rural areas.
- The county has good north-south transport links with the A1(M) and East Coast Mainline but east-west links are seen as an opportunity for development.

Council Contribution

The council is investing heavily in our town centres. New masterplans are being developed, free public wi-fi is being rolled out and new leisure facilities are to be built. We are also undertaking actions and campaigns which focus on environmental improvements, better quality housing, road safety and water safety.

Not only are we building new high-quality accessible homes to meet needs, but we are also maintaining or improving standards across existing housing stock. During 2021, we completed more than 1,328 new homes of which 466 were affordable, as well as improving, adapting or bringing back into use 2,064 properties, 171 of which were empty. Our new selective licensing scheme gives us powers to regulate landlords and managing agents of private rented properties in areas which suffer from low housing demand and/or high levels of anti-social behaviour and/or deprivation. The scheme will cover 29,000 properties, which equates to around 42% of the private rental stock.

During the pandemic, we set up the County Durham Together Community Hub. The hub contacted more than 4,000 residents identified as Extremely Vulnerable to COVID-19, responded to almost 21,000 requests for advice or support, contacted almost 7,500 positive COVID-19 cases (Local Tracing Partnership) and supported a further 500 identified by the national Test and Trace team as needing to self-isolate. It provided wrap-around COVID-19 support to almost 10,000 residents, in collaboration with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and local statutory organisations, and emergency food parcels or a personal shopping service to more than 3,000 vulnerable residents.

The council allocated £250,000 to set up 10 food hubs with The Bread and Butter Thing, a charity which aims to make life more affordable for people on low income by redistributing surplus food. Five of the hubs are operational, with each supporting around 50 families, and work to open the remaining five hubs is underway. We also provided Fun and Food, free holiday activities with healthy snacks for children and young people through schools, leisure centres, family centres and voluntary and community sector groups.

The council has also allocated £1.4 million to provide one-off funding to Area Action Partnerships, to provide additional community-based support as communities recover from the pandemic.

Approach

We want people in our communities to feel connected to, and supportive of, each other. We want to build on the indomitable spirit of our people and ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities are supported. Whether this be children in need of support, victims of crime, people with a disability or different communities of identity.

The council will continue to plan and train for emergency situations, operating in partnership with blue light services and other agencies to minimise the impact on communities.

We are developing plans to further integrate health, social and welfare support in a preventative way to help our local communities. This means looking more closely at individuals' and community needs and working with communities using our established 'Approach to Wellbeing' to see where we can improve people's wellbeing and reduce inequalities in our county.

We are undertaking a programme to improve social care services provided to children and young people and a range of initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour in our communities, in partnership with the police and others.

Some communities have been blighted by poor housing management practice, so we have plans to raise housing standards in the private rented housing sector and help improve these communities. We want to provide a range of new housing to meet the needs and aspirations of our residents. The design of new development in rural areas will be sympathetic to the environment and reflect local distinctiveness. We aim to deliver more affordable housing. We expect all homes to be connected digitally and for speed and capacity to keep pace with the latest developments. This is the aim of our Digital Durham programme. These issues are particularly acute in our rural areas.

High streets have seen some decline nationally and County Durham is no exception to this. We have developed a programme to regenerate our towns and villages and improve their use, making them a more attractive proposition to visit and spend time in. This includes a range of approaches, varying from introduction of free Wi-Fi, changing the mix of retail, leisure and residential use, making our centres more attractive and tackling community safety concerns. Residents and visitors need to be able to travel around our county and get to and from our towns and villages. We have therefore developed a pipeline of infrastructure projects and transport plans to improve accessibility.

Major Projects

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2022 | Develop the County Durham Together Community Hub to increase access to preventative services available in local communities |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Raise standards across the private rented sector through continuous engagement with landlords, extension of the Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme for responsible landlords and implementation of the Selective Licensing Scheme |

- **Build community resilience to the economic and social impacts of the pandemic by developing local priority projects linked to Area Action Partnership funding streams for COVID-19 recovery, welfare reform, social isolation, holiday activities with healthy food, regeneration of towns and villages and emerging neighbourhood issues**
 - The development of the care academy for children's residential services to support the recruitment and retention of staff in our children's homes.
 - Implementation of work programme to support individuals and families who have experienced domestic abuse
 - Investment and implementation of a new SEND Electronic Casework system to enhance service delivery and outcomes for children and young people.
 - Development of a County Durham Connectivity Strategy to support delivery of the North-East Strategic Transport Plan
 - Deliver the Chapter Homes Business Plan
 - Undertake a series of reviews in relation to the Home to School Transport service to ensure appropriate and efficient provision
 - Establish wrap around support team for Ukrainian nationals seeking refuge in County Durham
-

- 2023
- **Deliver a programme of regeneration within town centres and wider towns and villages**
by encouraging new town centre business, establishing a network of town centre Wi-Fi systems, facilitating the reoccupation / re-use or clearance of vacant and vulnerable property
 - Work with communities most affected by long-term empty properties to bring empty properties back into use wherever possible
 - Construction of new bus station in Durham City
 - Deliver the Housing Strategy
 - Develop and implement a strategy to support and sustain the Voluntary and Community Sector in County Durham, enabling resilience of our wider communities
 - Extend the wellbeing approach across the council and within commissioned services
 - Supply Seaham Garden Village development with geothermal heat from mine water treatment scheme
 - Deliver community housing schemes through the town and village centres programme
 - Develop and deliver pipeline of major transport infrastructure projects to improve connectivity across the county.

- Through the Community Action Team we will deliver in collaboration with partners a programme of area based initiatives to improve local environments and community safety
- Deliver a range of targeted interventions to improve housing and living standards
- Develop and deliver in partnership with other agencies a model to prevent and manage anti-social behaviour across the county
- Establish a multi-agency task force to deliver a local problem-solving approach within our most deprived areas and, through integrated working and community engagement, restore cultural norms and build cohesive communities
- Delivery of transport infrastructure projects to improve rural transport links across the County

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- 2024
- **Review and transform leisure facilities in line with the needs of our residents**
 - Manage and deliver the Housing Infrastructure Fund Newton Aycliffe Housing Growth Programme
 - Develop, submit and deliver Levelling Up 'Bids' across the County
 - Maximise opportunities for North East One Public Estate Partnership to realise estates savings and delivery of shared objectives
 - Maximise the delivery of affordable homes, both by securing developer contributions as part of new housing development and through close partnership with registered providers and Homes England

-
- 2025
- **Review and transform library services in line with the needs of our residents**

-
- 2026
- **Deliver the Auckland Castle, Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone, Future High Street Fund and Stronger Towns Fund**
 - **Deliver the Council Homes Programme**
-

Key Performance Indicators

- 171 empty properties brought back into use due to local authority intervention (200).
- 1,328 net homes completed .
- 466 affordable homes delivered .

- Percentage of Harbour clients feeling (a) more confident in themselves (b) their quality of life has improved, on case closure
- Percentage of children and young people completing an intervention with Harbour and reporting feeling safer
- Bring 200 empty homes back into use per year
- Increase occupancy rate of all town centres to above national levels by 2035
- Return the number of fly-tipping incidents to at least pre-COVID levels by 2035
- Maintain the percentage of land at below 12%, which falls below unacceptable levels of cleanliness in relation to detritus; in relation to litter to below 6%; in relation to dog fouling to below 1%
- Increase the percentage of households (within a 5 mile or 15 mile radius) which can access key service locations using public transport (against 2021 baseline)
- Maintain levels of satisfaction with bus operators at a minimum of 92%
- Maintain a downward trend in the amount of Highways Maintenance Backlog
- Aim to increase levels of public satisfaction with highways maintenance above the national average.
- Maintain the percentage of respondents above March 2020 levels, who agree that police and local authorities are dealing with ASB and crime issues in the local area
- Increase net delivery of new housing by 19,620 units by 2035
- Increase net delivery of affordable homes to contribute to meeting identified need of 12,540 by 2035
- Increase the % of County Durham residents who can access employment sites by public transport (against 2021 baseline)
- Achieve 100% licensing of private rented sector properties covered by the Selective Licensing Scheme by 2027
- Reduce ASB rates within the Selective Licensing Scheme areas by 10% (against the 2021 baseline)

Priority: Our Council

There have been unprecedented reductions in public spending in recent years. Technology has also been developing at pace and residents have come to expect that our services will be provided digitally and on a 24/7 basis. This required us to rethink the way in which many of our services are delivered. There is a history of good partnership working in County Durham. In a time when resources are scarce, it is even more important that organisations work more collaboratively and that our efforts are focused on the right things. Working more seamlessly across organisational boundaries and delivering services differently, which are designed with residents, is at the heart of our ambitions. We need to equip ourselves with the skills to be able to achieve this and develop a workforce for the future. Delivering existing services in different ways and developing new services for the benefit of our residents is both challenging and exciting and something that we need to excel at in order to become recognised as an excellent council, which is well-managed and listens to its residents.



Digital Durham



Achievements

- Durham County Council has delivered £250 million annual savings since 2011.
- Over 100 council services are available digitally and more than half of residents access our services this way.
- The council has had 1,113 apprenticeship starts since 2017. We have 292 people employed in apprenticeship posts and 213 existing staff are accessing the apprenticeship levy to increase their skills.
- The council holds the 'Maintaining Excellence' status in the Better Health at Work Award, which recognises the efforts of employers regionally in helping to address health issues of its workforce. 79 organisations are now signed up to the award programme, reaching over 40,000 employees.
- The council has 217 trained mental health first aiders and 82 Time To Change (mental health) champions.
- The council has been awarded the Disability Confident Leader status by the Department for Work and Pensions, in recognition of its commitment to be a good employer of people with a disability and support local businesses to become Disability Confident.
- Durham County Council was highly commended in two national awards by the Municipal Journal in 2021, one being for its digital transformation and one for its senior leadership team.
- We have continued to work with the County Durham Together Community Hub to proactively support residents and businesses, including 70,000 people identified as potentially vulnerable.

Issues to address

- Continuing impact of COVID-19 on the council's budget and uncertainties surrounding the UK withdrawal from the European Union.
- Changes to the delivery model for some frontline council services during COVID and to prioritise essential services. This includes the introduction or expansion of online service delivery.
- Learning from our experiences as we transition to living with COVID, we have set up a Protecting Health Team to address health protection skills and competencies across the workforce and provide expert advice and leadership in the management of communicable diseases.
- Forecast increases of 20% in energy prices and a 1.25% increase in employer's national insurance contributions are an additional budgetary pressure.
- Uncertainty of funding beyond 2022/23 due to the Fair Funding Review, the lack of clarity around New Homes Bonus and Public Health Grant which hinders medium-term financial planning.
- Superfast broadband and the national rollout of 5G networks will enable greater digital connectivity for our residents and offer opportunities for new digital services.
- Workforce instability is increasing across the council, with local and national skills shortages increasing competition within the jobs market.
- The council has an ageing workforce. 43% of its staff are over the age of 50, which has an impact on sickness absence rates and requires effective workforce planning.
- One quarter of staff (27%) rate their mental wellbeing as five or lower (with one being the lowest and 10 the highest). During the pandemic, 24% of staff felt that their health and wellbeing was not supported.
- Society is experiencing a technological revolution where progress is accelerating and innovations can be identified and rapidly deployed, making it difficult to keep pace and ensure that the skills of our staff are up to date.
- The council together with its partners, should seek to maximise the value of every pound spent and seek to deliver social value outcomes. Social, economic and environmental outcomes should be delivered for the local community by adopting a strategic approach during its commissioning, procurement, development and planning projects.
- The council needs to recognise that the data we hold are an asset and manage them more efficiently to better understand service users, generating benefits such as predicting and managing demand, providing the services residents want and supporting better decision-making.

Council Contribution

The council employs 7,823 people to deliver a wide range of services. However, to remain relevant and meet the needs of its residents and communities, it needs to continually adapt, investing in both technology and the skills of its workforce.

Our apprenticeship programme remains integral to both workforce development and addressing current and future skills needs. Around 3.3% of our workforce is currently enrolled in the programme, and the £7.6 million invested to date has allowed more than 1,100 employees to participate. In addition, 82 new apprentices joined our workforce in 2021.

We provide a range of contact channels and have invested heavily in new digital technology in recent years. Although almost 80% of the 1.7 million contacts received through our reported channels each year is by telephone, more customers are interacting with us digitally. This shift is particularly noticeable across service requests logged within our Customer Relationship Management system - 73% are now logged digitally compared to 62% in 2020 – and almost 235,000 residents across 157,000 unique properties now have an online account. Our new webchat service, available across more than 30 web pages, is now used by more than 600 customers each month.

Feedback continues to be important to us and we have increased the number of service request types which automatically e-mail satisfaction surveys to customers on closure – this feature is now available across 117 service request types, compared to 25 in October 2017. We are working to increase response rates, as 24 service requests receive 90% of the responses.

The pandemic impacted on our service delivery, ways of working and employees. However, throughout the pandemic, our sickness rate steadily declined, reaching its lowest level since 2010/11 at year-end 2020/21. If we adjust our sickness rate to account for days lost due to COVID-19, then our rate remains comparatively low at just over nine days per full time equivalent (FTE).

We continue to promote support mechanisms to increase emotional resilience and protect the mental health of our staff, some long-established, others developed in response to COVID-19, and have recently developed additional support in the key areas of financial awareness, fertility, bereavement and the menopause. In relation to menopause awareness, eight sessions and 160 training places were arranged and made available for employees for this year.

The council is collaborating with local partners, to deliver social value outcomes within County Durham by the strategic use of procurement its own spending power through the County Durham Pound project. The objective of this project is to maximise the

value of every pound spent in the county to help money remain in the local economy, recirculating, creating employment opportunities and stronger more sustainable communities within the County.

Approach

The current COVID-19 national crisis has required the council to adapt working practices to continue to deliver services safely. We have had to close a number of our buildings such as leisure centres, theatres and libraries. Our ICT infrastructure is allowing many of our employees to work remotely. Many of our staff who cannot work in their substantive role have also been redeployed in priority areas. Several services have now moved online. In the immediate aftermath of lockdown, the council temporarily postponed the delivery of certain services while we ensured that the correct safeguards were in place to protect the public and our employees and ensure that our priority services were not affected. The pandemic has had a significant financial impact in terms of additional expenditure incurred and loss of income. However, there have been some unintended benefits such as reductions in carbon emissions. The council will look to build on this and use technology to reduce our impact on the environment.

The council has faced significant cuts to its funding over the last 10 years. Uncertainties with future local government funding make financial planning extremely difficult. We still await both the government's Comprehensive Spending Review and Fair Funding Review which will determine our future funding. This means that we have been unable to plan for the long-term, with most of our financial planning being limited to only one year of certainty. Key actions for us will be to assess the implications of these reviews when they are published and to amend our Medium-Term Financial Plan accordingly.

We want our workforce to be fit for any future challenges and so we need to ensure that our future plans recognise and address any risks such as skills shortages, ageing workforce, recruitment difficulties and changes in service user behaviour and demand. The health and welfare of our workforce is important, and we have a range of actions we plan to implement to support the physical and mental health and wellbeing of employees and ensure that we have an inclusive staff culture.

Expectations of our residents are changing. People expect to be able to transact business with the council on a 24/7 basis and would like self-serve online. Our services should be co-designed with service users and we plan to improve our engagement mechanisms, particularly with children and young people. Managers need access to real-time data to support good decision-making and we have a programme to develop our business intelligence capability and provide better analysis to help understand our performance and facilitate better planning and service delivery. Some of our services are delivered in partnership with other agencies and we have plans to further join up our delivery to offer a more seamless approach for the benefit of our residents.

Further detail of the programmes we plan to implement to be an excellent council are provided in our delivery plan.

Major Projects

- 2022
- **Implement a new performance management framework for Adult and Health Services, to enable more timely analysis of data, improved business intelligence and real-time presentation of data**
 - Achieve Better Health at Work Award 'Continuing Excellence' status for the council
 - Develop a strategy for employee health and wellbeing
 - Work towards the sharing of information about a person's assessments, treatment and care through the Great North Care Record, to ensure that staff, patients and service users can make informed decisions about services
 - Further develop specific engagement mechanisms with children and young people to understand the voice of the child in service provision, including development of a Youth Council
 - Plan and deliver effective communications to build trust, support and keep stakeholders informed and promote safety messages
 - Work with NHS partners to roll out Health Call in care homes, to improve the transfer of information to health professionals
 - Further develop the performance management framework for children and young people's services linked to the new case recording system, to improve managers' grip on all areas of performance
 - Develop a zero-carbon council depot at the Morrison Busty site at Annfield Plain
 - Conduct a full staff health and wellbeing survey (the Working Well Survey)
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- 2023
- **Review the implications of the government's Fair Funding Review**
 - **Re-procure our waste contracts**
 - **Extend the mental health workforce development programme across the council, to increase awareness and support available for staff**
 - **Develop a digital skills programme and invest in smarter working**

- **Increase self-service of performance data by developing business intelligence dashboards**
 - Review the assistive technologies offer for adult care and develop a new Assistive Technology Strategy
 - Continue to deliver the digital transformation programme at a service level
 - Maximise the use of existing technology and trial new technologies to improve efficiency
 - Expand automation and self-service to employees
 - Undertake a corporate peer challenge with the Local Government Association to help us identify strengths and areas for improvement within the council
 - Demonstrate both long-term commitment and practice around workplace health and wellbeing by achieving Ambassador Status in the Better Health at Work Award
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Key Performance Indicators

- 10.1 days / shifts lost to sickness absence across all services excluding schools (11.2)
- 83% Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to within 20 working days (90%)
- Reduce the council's carbon emissions by 80% by 2030
- Collection rates
- MTFP targets achieved
- Audit opinion
- Percentage of workforce learning new skills / re-training (apprentice levy)
- Average age of employees in key employment groups
- Employee turnover
- Applicants per vacant post in key employment groups
- Percentage of transactions which are self-serve
- Survey response rates (satisfaction with service)
- Number of customers engaged (adult /children)
- Percentage of managers supported by automated BI dashboards

Glossary of Terms

5G	Fifth generation or latest iteration of telecommunications networks which is designed to greatly increase the speed and responsiveness of wireless networks
Attainment 8 score	A measure of the average attainment of pupils in up to eight qualifications at KS4
Better Health at Work Award	An award recognising the efforts of employers in the North-East and Cumbria in addressing health issues within the workplace
Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone	A regeneration area in Bishop Auckland's conservation area which has been agreed by Historic England and has been created to improve the town's historic centre and bring it back to be a vibrant market town for both locals and visitors
Brexit	The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union
Channel shift	The degree to which residents are moving to dealing with the council through digital means from more traditional methods, such as face-to-face and telephone
Council Tax Hardship Fund	A reduction of £300 on your Council Tax bill awarded to people who have been significantly financially impacted by COVID-19
County Durham Together	A virtual hub developed to help support people to stay in their own home and protect them from contracting the coronavirus by putting them in touch with people who can support with access to food and essential supplies, medicines, financial help and social interaction for those experiencing loneliness and isolation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019, the respiratory disease caused by the new strain of the coronavirus

Deprivation indices	Widely used datasets used to classify the relative deprivation of an area. The latest Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) measures relative deprivation for small areas or neighbourhoods and ranks every area from the most deprived to the least deprived in England
Disability Confident	A government scheme designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain disabled people and those with health conditions. Level 3 or highest level of the Disability Confident scheme which recognises the commitment towards disabled staff and acting as a champion for Disability Confident within local and business communities
Education and health care plan	A legal document which describes a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need and the outcomes they would like to achieve
Furlough	Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme operated by HMRC. All UK employers were able to access support to continue paying part of their employee's salary for those employees who would otherwise be laid off during the COVID-19 crisis
GCSEs	General Certificate of Secondary Education
Great North Care Record	An initiative to allow healthcare practitioners (from emergency departments, mental health, 111 services, ambulance and out of hours services) to access information from a patient's GP record
Hate crime	A range of criminal behaviour where the perpetrator is motivated by hostility or demonstrates hostility towards the victim's disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity
Healthy life expectancy	The proportion of life spent in good health or free from a limiting illness or disability
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
Homes England	A non-departmental public body which funds new affordable housing in England

Levelling up	A government policy which aims to reduce, mainly economic, imbalances between geographical areas and social groups in the United Kingdom.
MTFP	Medium-Term Financial Plan. This is a three-year plan which sets out the council's funding outlook, spending priorities and planned efficiencies over the medium-term
Ofsted	The Office of Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. The organisation responsible for inspecting services providing education and skills for learners of all ages and inspection and regulation of services which care for children and young people
Ofsted rating	The rating scale Ofsted uses in its inspections of education providers, such as schools and children's social care providers (for example, the council). There are four grades: 1. Outstanding; 2. Good; 3. Requires Improvement; 4. Inadequate
R number	The reproduction number is the average number of secondary infections produced by a single infected person. An R number of 1 means that on average, every person who is infected will infect one other person, meaning that the number of infections is stable. If R is greater than 1, the epidemic is growing. If R is less than 1, the epidemic is shrinking.
Reablement	Services for people with poor physical or mental health to help them accommodate their illness by learning or re-learning the skills necessary for daily living
SARS-CoV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 is the strain of coronavirus which causes COVID-19, the respiratory illness responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic
SATs	Standard Assessment Test
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
Signs of Safety	A strength-based and safety-focused approach to child protection casework originally developed in Australia and now adopted and used by local authorities in many other countries, including the UK

Trusted assessor model	Trusted Assessors is a national initiative designed to reduce delays when people are ready for discharge from hospital.
Welfare Assistance Scheme	Short-term support for people in crisis. There are two types: daily living expenses for up to seven days when your circumstances change unexpectedly; and settlement grants to help you stay at home or move back into housing
Wi-Fi	A wireless network allowing computers, tablets, smartphones and other devices to connect to the Internet or communicate with one another wirelessly within an area
Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) Initiative	A programme for helping teenagers explore how to protect their own mental health and support those around them. YAM presents promising results – groups which have completed the programme show significantly reduced levels of moderate to extreme depression, and reductions in suicide attempts and ideation

Durham County Council Strategic Planning Framework

The following diagram sets out the key strategic plans for Durham County Council.

