



# Durham County Council Council Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27



## 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 impacting across all aspects of people's lives.

We are committed to growing our economy, and our new Inclusive Economic Strategy sets out how we are working with businesses and communities to provide the best opportunities for economic growth – leading to more and better jobs for local people across County Durham.

The cost of living crisis has placed significant pressures on families and businesses over the last 12 months. We remain committed to supporting our most vulnerable residents through what are unprecedented times whilst also focusing on the environment and our climate commitments.

Like many of our businesses and local partners, the Council is currently facing significant financial pressures from high inflation, which is impacting on our operating costs and the cost of construction and supply chains. We are actively reviewing several programmes of work to make sure that we have the right balance between achieving things that matter to local people whilst ensuring this can be delivered financially and that we provide value for money. We are continuing our focus on making the council more efficient, support families through the current cost-of-living pressures and maintaining a package of additional support to financially vulnerable households.

We are rightly proud of our county, our heritage, our people and our culture. We want to place our county on the national and international stage – particularly in 2025, which marks the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Stockton to Darlington Railway, a route which started in Willington in County Durham! Having been shortlisted to the final four to become UK City of Culture in 2025, we remain committed to delivering a pioneering cultural programme with a lasting legacy. We know that our county has 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 sets out the priority actions being taken forward by the council in support of the vision.

We will also continue to support our communities as the country continues to recover from the impacts of 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, which is why in the last year we have declared an ecological emergency and recast our carbon reduction targets and actions. We have built on the success of securing our first constituency Levelling Up bid by developing and submitting robust bids for the other five constituency areas across county Durham and await the outcome of those bids.

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 vision County Durham for 2035 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.



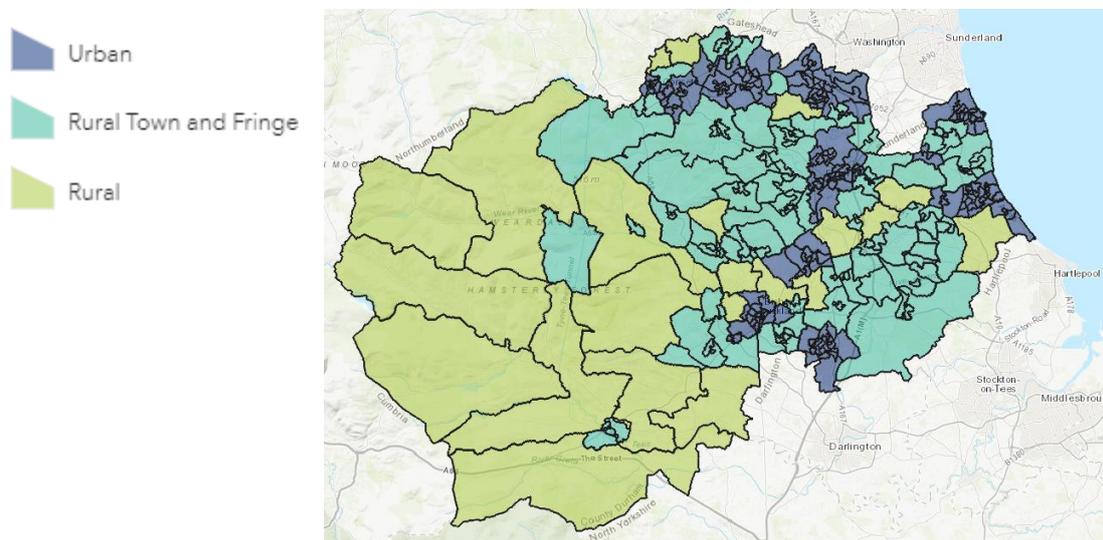
Councillor Amanda Hopgood,  
Leader of the Council



John Hewitt,  
Chief Executive

## Population and Area

County Durham covers an area of 222,606 hectares and has an estimated population of 522,100<sup>1</sup>. 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.<sup>2</sup>



Land type	Area of county	population	Population density per hectare
Rural	57%	7%	0.3
Rural Town and Fringe <sup>3</sup>	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 and challenges. The county has over 300 recognised settlements, 23 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

<sup>1</sup> Census 2021, Office for National Statistics

<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> Landscape interface between town and country / transition between urban and rural where urban and rural use clashes

this Council Plan and rural proofing is embedded as a major consideration in any policies that we develop.

## Council Services

Durham County Council plays a crucial role in the lives of all residents delivering a breadth of services across the county. The following examples illustrate the range of services we provide.



**19,000** adults supported by social care



**148** allotment sites



**5 miles** of records held in strong rooms



**46** cemeteries and **96** closed church yards



**2** crematorium joint committees



**3,800** children supported by social care



Corporate parent to over **1,000** children



**3m** visits annually to our **15** leisure centres



**10** swimming pools



**809,000** sq ft business 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



**2,363** miles of highways



**12,500** contacts to Housing Solutions p.a.



**57,000** Council Tax Reduction claimants



**39** libraries with over **200,000** members



**9** parks and **12** green flag awards



**82,422** street lights



**£4.2m** subsidy provided to bus operators to run non-profitable routes



Over **150** Warm Spaces supported for people to go to get warm



**2,191** miles of public rights of way



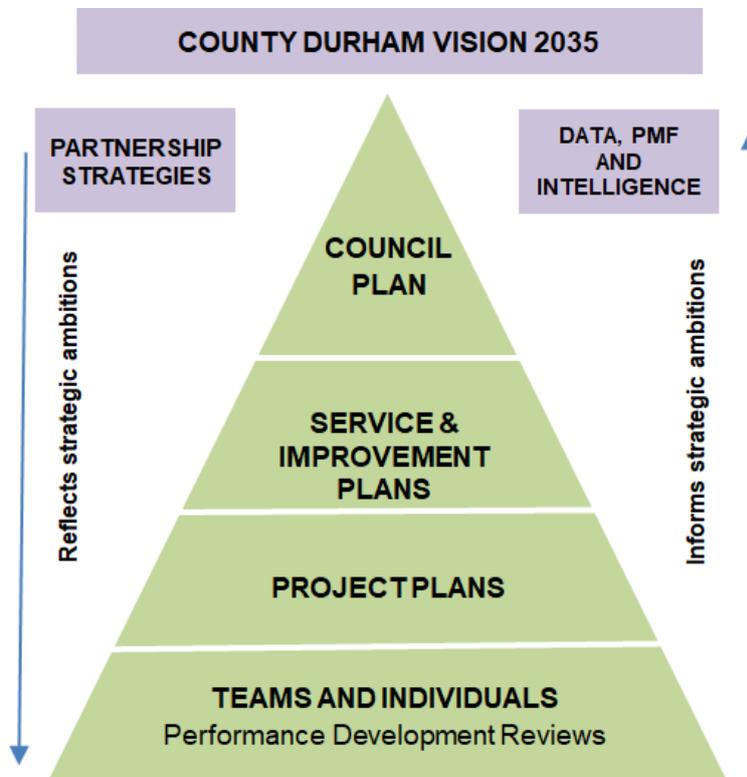
**1 million** bins emptied per month

## 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 through our transformation agenda.
- **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**
- **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**
- Support people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protect adults with care and support needs from harm
- Protect and improve the health of the local population, tackling leading causes of illness and death

Objectives in **bold** are adopted from the Vision for County Durham 2035

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

## 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
- Narrow the inequality gap 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\*

Objectives in **bold** are adopted from the Vision for County Durham 2035

\* 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 in an inclusive, green economy**, 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 the development of a number of strategic employment sites with exciting opportunities for the development of Aykley Heads and the redevelopment of Front Street in 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 support businesses to grow, innovate and reduce their environmental impacts and through the County Durham Pound, encourage businesses to work together to support countywide growth. We will ensure that children and young people receive high-quality education, training and support to equip them with the skills they need to progress into the employment 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 history centre and registration service, The Story at Mount Oswald, 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. The development of our visitor offer goes hand-in-hand with the diversification of the economy and making the county more attractive to talented and creative people and businesses.

**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. The Education Service will work to reduce the carbon footprint for all schools in relation to their training needs, by making both real and virtual-live training opportunities of the highest quality readily accessible locally.

**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 address 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 Education Service will provide a professional learning programme of high quality to schools and settings that, through its design, supports and sustains them as they prepare young people for success in life and employability. The council has also set out a 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 families, children and individuals 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 have embarked 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.

## People and Places

### Empowering communities

working with communities to support their development and empowerment

### Being asset focused

acknowledging the different needs of communities and the potential of their assets

### Building resilience

helping the most disadvantaged and vulnerable and building up their future resilience

## Supporting Systems

### Working better together

working together across sectors to reduce duplication and ensure greater impact

### Sharing decision making

designing and developing services and initiatives with the people who need them

### Doing with, not to

making our interventions empowering and centred around you as an individual



### Using what works

everything we do is supported by evidence informed by local conversations

## 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 [annual budget and medium-term plan](#) 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 spending power of £51.6 million from the provisional Local Government Settlement. This will be vital in ensuring that significant ongoing budget pressures can be financed – which total approximately £81 million in 2023/24. Examples include the National Living Wage 9.7% uplift, energy costs which are forecast to increase in 2023/24 by over 80% from current budgeted levels 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 £167 (c7%) less than the England average. If Durham's Core Spending Power was brought up to the England authority average of £2,360 per dwelling, the council would annually receive additional government grant of £42 million.

The council faces a forecast £25.5 million funding shortfall in 2023/24. To address this shortfall savings of £12.7 million are proposed with a use of the MTFP Support Reserve of circa £12.8 million to balance the budget.

Despite a very challenging financial period and the significant base budget pressures faced by the council the 2023/24 budget included some very positive outcomes for the people of County Durham, including:

- 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 £75 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 £121.8 million was agreed as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan, with the Council committed to a Capital Programme of £778 million. – the most ambitious and significant level of investment the Council has ever agreed.

A key risk for the Council in 2023/24 and potentially beyond is the cost of living crisis. Rising fuel and energy costs are driving consumer price inflation, which is impacting on residents' household budgets, particularly those on lower incomes. This is

affecting demand for council services in a number of ways. Pay and price inflation is also a material consideration for council finances. The 2023/24 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**

This Plan sets out key measures which we will use to determine whether we are delivering on outcomes for the people of County Durham. In some instances, we have set out what good looks like against these key measures to aid the reader and these remain aspirations for the council.

The Plan also sets out our council service performance indicators where we have identified the services we provide which are major contributors to achieving our outcomes. In some instances, we will use targets against these indicators to manage performance

We will monitor council performance against these key measures and council service performance indicators and report to Cabinet and scrutiny committees on a quarterly basis. The plan will be subject to an annual review process

## Priority: Our Economy

We will continue to support growth, helping people to access more and better jobs in an inclusive, green economy. We will support businesses to grow in the county, adopt low carbon technologies, and cut their energy use. 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 aligned to local economic opportunities.

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. Consultation with local residents, young people and businesses highlighted the opportunity to develop the county as a visitor destination as well as for the benefit of local residents. We have made great strides to improve our visitor offer and our new Inclusive Economic Strategy will support an improved year-round visitor economy with investments in our visitor and cultural and creative infrastructure, assets, and facilities. Our aim is for County Durham to be widely recognized as a leading centre for culture and the arts, with a range of experiences that match and exceed the best offered in the country.

Through conversations with our residents, businesses, young people and community groups, we understand the challenges that we face together and will work in partnership to tackle different forms of exclusion. This includes harnessing the opportunities of the digital economy and ensuring as many local people as possible have the infrastructure, equipment, and training needed to access local services, jobs, and education. We will use our resources and investment where we can to secure support from other investors, businesses, social enterprises, and charities to tackle local challenges and promote untapped local opportunities across the county whilst protecting and enhancing our habitats and historic assets.

## Achievements

- Positive discussions have taken place with other neighbouring authorities and the government to reach a provisional deal to unlock billions of pounds of investment and see additional powers transferred from Whitehall to the North East.
- £25 million investment and completion of phase 1 of Jade Business Park. Creating seven new units totalling more than 14,000 sqm of industrial space to accommodate 250 jobs.
- £75 million of private sector investment in new industrial and warehousing at Connect at Integra 61 creating 640,000 sq ft



- of new industrial and warehousing space and contributing to the 4,000 jobs that will be accommodated on Integra 61.
- £271 million invested in one of Europe's leading technology parks at NETPark delivered and managed by Business Durham, with 16,000 sqm of office and laboratory space supporting 650 jobs.
- Planning approval to bring forward over 800,000 sq ft of development at Forrest Park in Aycliffe to potentially build 8 factory units.
- Developed an Inclusive Economic Strategy for the County to support future economic growth
- Investment Plans submitted for UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Multiple Programme and the Rural England Prosperity Fund, bringing in £37.1m to support Durham's economic growth over the next three years.
- Planning consent secured for over 400,000 sq ft of office space at Aykley Heads site with the potential to create 4,000 jobs.
- Secured £20million Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for the Bishop Auckland Constituency Proposal. Also developed 5 proposals for the remaining constituencies as part of Round 2 of the LUF
- Delivered a successful festivals and events programme including the Bishop Auckland and Seaham food festivals, Durham Book Festival and BRASS which were attended by over 95,000 people in 2022.
- Our Post 16 outcomes have improved steadily over time with average grades at A level above national averages from 2018.
- Over 13,500 children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are supported to achieve good outcomes in our schools and colleges. Almost 85% of these are supported in their local mainstream nursery, school or college
- The Percentage of our children and young people attending an Ofsted judged 'Good or Better' school is 91.2% at Nursery and Primary, 76.9% at secondary and 96.3% at special schools.

### Issues to address

- The employment rate has been relatively stable at around 71.5% for the last two years despite the difficult economic conditions but we need to continue to attract more and better jobs in order to catch-up with the national average.
- The economic recovery from Covid-19 has been set-back by the escalating cost of living crisis, whereby substantial price rises are affecting all parts of the economy.
- Income levels are low in County Durham. The county is the 42<sup>nd</sup> most income-deprived out of 151 local authorities nationally. Gross disposable household income per head of population in County Durham is just over 76% of the national average.
- The gap between the employment rate for people with a disability compared with those who are not disabled stands

- at 34.7 percentage points (March 2022) which is one of the highest differences in the country.
- In 2022, 90.2% of 16-17-year-olds within County Durham were participating in education, employment or training.
  - GCSE results as measured through the average attainment 8 score for the county are below the national average.
  - 84.5% of pupils attend a school judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' (as at October 2022).
  - Child poverty is increasing, by autumn 2022 around 30% of school children are claiming free school meals increasing by around a fifth in the last two years.
- According to the latest figures (2020), an estimated 14.7% of households are in fuel poverty. This is defined as where the householder is living in a property with a fuel energy efficiency rating of band D or below; and 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 £22.97 in the local economy per day, whilst overnight visitors will spend an average of £209.61 per trip. Only 9% of visitors will stop overnight within the county.

## 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 £58 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. Phase three is expected to be completed in 2024.

In 2023 phase 2 of Jade Business Park will be built to provide seven new industrial premises following the success of the seven units built during phase 1. This will help to address the overall shortage of modern business premises in the county and strong demand.

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 and transition to a higher value economy. We are supporting businesses across the County many different ways and through the County Durham Pound are encouraging local businesses to work together and buy from and supply one another.

We have a substantial and varied property portfolio across County Durham, providing space for over 300 businesses employing 1,600 people, including offices, workshops, the Durham Dales Centre and we manage the region's only science park, NETPark. Through initiatives such as the Durham City Incubator we are working with Durham University and New College Durham to give intensive support to enterprising people with unique products and services that will grow and diversify our local economy.

Working with all schools, academies and trusts the Education Service will support parents and carers in driving improved attendance and school engagement for all pupil groups and minimise the degree of pupil mobility, suspensions and exclusions across all key stages ensuring that Durham young people have equal or better access to high quality teaching and provision. We will also support maintained schools to ensure outcomes and Ofsted inspections across all phases, compare favourably, against national and regional averages. 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

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 2021/22, supported 503 people into employment and 43 into education and training. Durham Works is a dedicated programme for young people aged 16-24 who are not in 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 help 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 entered a bid to be UK City of Culture 2025. We were shortlisted to the final four and whilst we did not take the title, we remain committed to delivering a pioneering cultural programme with a lasting legacy. This will deliver 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.

The council has developed a Poverty Strategy and associated action plan together with a range of partners. This approach includes ensuring residents get what they are entitled to through income maximisation and benefits take up. We are improving our support schemes such as the council tax reduction scheme, welfare assistance and discretionary housing payments. We are also working to ensure that it is easier for residents to access all of the help on offer. We are also working with charities and community groups to provide a collaborative approach to poverty alleviation on initiatives such as Warm Spaces.

## Approach

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.

We have a strong pipeline of investment projects across the county and we want to deliver our strategic employment sites and support key business sectors and innovation opportunities. 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 and enhancing the quality of what makes our towns, villages and landscapes distinctive. Our county has a rich historic and cultural heritage, some enviable world-class attractions and beautiful countryside. We want to continue to develop our visitor economy offer for tourists, local residents, and to improve the overall promotion of the County to investors, learners, and new residents.

## Priority Actions<sup>4</sup>

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- 2023/24
- Bring forward key locations for business attraction and growth *including Forrest Park, Jade Business Park*
  - **Carry out public consultation and a governance review for the devolution deal for LA7 area covering County Durham, Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, Sunderland, South Tyneside and Northumberland**
  - **Assure the delivery of and secure tenants for the Milburngate redevelopment project in Durham**
  - **Bring together the history and heritage of the county into ‘The Story’ (Durham History Centre)**
  - Develop the Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plans for the County that integrate with national, regional, sub-regional and local strategies
  - Development and delivery of a pipeline of major transport infrastructure projects to support employment sites *including Jade Business Park Infrastructure, Integra Phase 2 and Toft Hill Bypass*
  - Delivery of the Tourism Strategic Framework, including the refreshed Durham Destination Management Plan
  - Ensure the delivery of employability programmes that assist residents to access and sustain job opportunities
  - Deliver our Education Operational Plan
    - Maintained schools are given appropriate and proportionate support to ensure outcomes and Ofsted inspections across all phases, compare favourably, against national and regional averages.
    - Working with all schools, academies and trusts to support parents and carers in driving improved attendance and school engagement for all pupil groups.
    - To minimise the degree of pupil mobility, suspensions and exclusions across all key stages ensuring that Durham young people have equal or better access to high quality educational provision.
    - To work with all schools, academies and trusts to ensure sufficiency of places across all Durham, early years setting’s, primary and secondary Schools in line with changing demographics and school performance related factors.
    - To support schools and settings to improve the quality of teaching, ensuring professional learning networks are offered to educational professionals at all levels, drawing explicit focus to areas of local and national priority.

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<sup>4</sup> Those in bold are identified as major projects and are monitored by CMT Major Initiatives Board

- Deliver DurhamWorks Programme for Schools to ensure young people at greater risk of becoming NEET have access to careers education, information, advice, guidance and support to enable them to make a positive progression into post-16 education, employment and training
- Support more young people with vulnerable characteristics into employment, including young people who have SEND, children looked after, care experienced young people, young people supervised by the Youth Justice Service, young parents, young carers, young people who are elective home educated.
- Review the Employment & Skills Strategy through the Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plans
- Implement our [Poverty Strategy and Action Plan](#) to help protect residents most at risk of poverty and exclusion, increase equality of opportunity and ensure fewer people are affected by poverty and deprivation
- Develop the 'Better Business for All' initiative to help reduce the burden of regulation on local businesses, improve business compliance and promote local economic growth

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- 2024/25
- **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**
  - Support delivery of the new visitor product across County Durham
  - Deliver a range of initiatives to alleviate poverty *including working with registered providers and providing advice and signposting to people who are struggling with housing costs*
  - Working in partnership deliver the Regional Destination Development Partnership pilot

- 
- 2025/26
- **Deliver sites within Durham County Council's remit and enhance Property Portfolio *including Aykley Heads, NETPark Phase 3, Merchant Park, Jade Business Park and South Church Enterprise Park***
  - Review of events and festivals offer and preparation for NPO submissions for 2026-2029

- 
- 2026/27
- **Deliver 'The Story' (Durham History Centre) Heritage Lottery Fund Programme Plan**
  - **Deliver the legacy of the City of Culture bid through the Culture County Programme**
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## Key Measures

- Increase the amount of employment land approved and delivered by 300 hectares by 2035 (against 2016 baseline)
- Grow the number of private sector business and private sector employments per 10,000 head of population within County Durham to close the gap with the national average by 2035
- Increase the level of GVA per filled job to close the gap with the national average by 2035
- Increase the employment rate for 16-64 year olds to close the gap with the national average by 2035
- Increase the proportion of residents with higher level skills to close the gap with the national average 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 disability employment rate to close the gap between the employment rates for residents with a disability and those who are not disabled
- Increase the number of visitors to the County to pre-Covid levels by 2025
- Increase the value of the visitor economy profile in County Durham (Number of jobs supported, amount (£m) generated)
- Increase the proportion of visitor attractions which are served by public transport (against 2021 baseline)
- Reduce the number of heritage assets 'at risk' that are categorised as 'Priority A and/or in 'very bad condition' (against 2021 baseline)
- Increase the proportion of children and young people with EHC plans attending a mainstream school
- Proportion of children living in low-income families
- Percentage of schools Ofsted judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding' school

## Council Service Performance Indicators

- Percentage of office and industrial floorspace occupied
- Number of jobs created or safeguarded by Business Durham
- GVA from jobs created or safeguarded by Business Durham
- % of jobs created by Business Durham which are high level jobs
- Number of jobs created or safeguarded through regeneration projects
- Amount (£) of investments secured by companies
- Number of Inward Investments secured

- Number/£ investment through Finance Durham Fund
- Number of businesses supported by Business Durham (engagements)
- Number of businesses intensively assisted
- Number of new businesses supported by Community Economic Development Team
- Number of registrations to employability programmes
- Number of participants on employability programmes progressed into employment / education or training
- Number of tourism businesses actively engaged with Visit County Durham
- Average % occupancy of screenings/performances during the quarter (BATH, Gala and Empire)
- Average % yield of screenings/performances during the quarter (BATH, Gala and Empire)
- Number of people attending Council owned cultural venues
- Number of people attending Culture, Sport & Tourism ran and commissioned cultural events
- Number of active library borrowers
- Number of heritage assets in County Durham identified as being at risk on the Heritage Asset Register
- Number of Council owned heritage assets “at risk”
- Number of Council non-designated heritage assets “at risk”
- Increase the proportion of 16–17-year-olds in education, employment and training to narrow the gap with regional and national levels
- School Attendance
- Elective Home education
- Percentage of eligible disadvantaged 2-year-old children registered for 15hr entitlement
- Primary and Secondary Ofsted ratings
- Free school meals eligibility and take-up

## Priority: Our Environment

One of the biggest issues facing the planet is the climate emergency. Scientific evidence shows that increased rates of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, through the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, intensive livestock farming and other industrial practices have led to an increase in global average temperatures, droughts, flooding events and more unpredictability in weather patterns. 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. To this end, the council is committed to showing leadership in taking action to address the decline of habitats and species across the county by declaring an Ecological Emergency for County Durham, to be accompanied by an action plan that enables a positive response across council services.

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

- Carbon emissions across the county have reduced by 57% from the 1990 baseline.
- Securing significant funding from Government for decarbonisation projects, from building retrofits to EV charging infrastructure

- 16,000 hectares of blanket bog have been restored in County Durham, avoiding 192,000 tonnes of carbon from being emitted each year.
- We are pursuing three bids to improve sustainable transport through the reopening of rail lines at Consett, Stillington and Weardale.
- Scaling On Street Charging Initiative (SOSCI) project has installed 153 EV charge points sockets, 10 of which are rapid charge, the other 143 being 7-22 kWh fast charging, in towns, libraries, leisure centres and community centres.
- County Durham Fuel Poverty Partnership has enabled residents in County Durham to have the 4th highest uptake of energy efficiency grants nationally, working with landlords to improve quality and energy efficiency of buildings and supporting low carbon retrofit for off-gas homes.

### Issues to address

- The council is committed to exploring more sustainable transport choices and we are pursuing three bids for rail connections from Ferryhill to Teesside, Consett to Tyne and Darlington to Weardale 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.
- An Air Quality Management Area where national standards for levels of pollutants has been declared in parts of Durham City, 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, to be accompanied by an action plan that enables a positive response to be delivered across council services.
- 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

Climate change poses one of the greatest threats to civilisation and has the potential to cause catastrophic problems for generations to come. The council has recognised the severity of this threat and has declared a climate emergency. Whilst the council itself generates carbon emissions from its operations such as from its buildings, vehicles and street lighting, it is calculated that these emissions make up only 3% of those emitted in total from the county. This is why we have developed a twofold action plan to address this, the first part being to reduce our own carbon emissions as an organisation and the second, how we can work with partners and the public to achieve a carbon neutral county by 2045.

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 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 reducing waste, increasing reuse and recycling and improving the quality of recycling material through education. Our in-house teams carry out regular and reliable collection services to around 250,000 households and 3,200 businesses, as well as providing 13 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

In addition to the scheduled services during 2021/22, we completed 31,000 bulky household waste collections and cleared up 5,700 fly-tips. Our work amassed 272,484 tonnes of municipal waste, including 1,592 tonnes of fly-tipped waste. 38% of our total

municipal solid waste collected by the Authority was re-used, recycled or composted. Of the waste sent for disposal, 90% was diverted from landfill and was converted to energy.

## Approach

The council declared a climate emergency for County Durham in 2019 and has developed two costed action plans, one for the council's carbon reduction target and another for the countywide target. We have been upgrading our streetlights with new LED light fittings. 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. We also have a programme to install more vehicle charging points in locations across the county and are exploring the potential for mine-water heat at a number of sites across the County including Seaham and Horden.

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 and nationally significant 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, however these often fragile habitats are increasingly under threat from a range of pressures and in response to this, we have declared an ecological emergency for the county. Following on from this commitment the council is now taking forward a comprehensive 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.

## Priority Actions<sup>5</sup>

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|----------------|--|
| <b>2023/24</b> | ▪ Adopt a Minerals and Waste Development Plan Document to ensure a ready supply of minerals and to maximise the recycling and reuse of waste |
|----------------|--|
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<sup>5</sup> Those in bold are identified as major projects and are monitored by CMT Major Initiatives Board

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop policies and plans to tackle the ecological emergency within County Durham <i>including preparing an Ecology Supplementary Planning Document</i></li> <li>▪ Manage the council's tree and woodland resource <i>including preparing a Trees, Woodlands and Hedges Supplementary Planning Document</i></li> <li>▪ Review our local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Surface Water Management Plan and deliver flood prevention schemes</li> <li>▪ Co-ordinate the implementation of the local Air Quality Action Plan with the aim of improving air quality within Durham City to meet the standards set within the National Air Quality Strategy</li> </ul>
2024/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Implementation and monitoring of Climate Emergency Response Plan 2</b> <i>including preparation of a solar energy Supplementary Planning Document, reviewing key operations that impact on the natural environment and raising awareness of the issues with our communities.</i></li> <li>▪ Increase the use of active travel to encourage physical activity (including walking and cycling) to reduce traffic emissions related to respiratory illness and carbon emissions <i>including Transforming Cities programme, LUF and Towns and Villages Walking and Cycling improvements, Sedgfield to Wynyard Active Mode Scheme and LCWIP Interventions</i></li> <li>▪ Delivery of transport infrastructure projects to encourage more sustainable transport choices <i>including Framwellgate Waterside, Transforming Cities programme, Restoring Your Railways schemes and green infrastructure at transport hubs</i></li> </ul>
2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of the Nature Recovery Network Strategy for County Durham in partnership with the Environment and Climate Change Partnership Ecological Emergency workstream</li> </ul>
2026/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Procure, build, commission and operate, a 450,000 tonne Energy Recovery Facility with heat off take and carbon capture capability, with six regional local authority partners</b></li> <li>▪ Support and deliver Local Nature and Landscape Partnership programmes <i>including Land of Oak and Iron Legacy; Seascapes; Durham Woodland Revival; Brightwater; North East Community Forest; Heritage Coast and the Woodland Creation Programme for the planting of new trees and woodland</i></li> </ul>
Post 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development and delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)</li> <li>▪ Implement the Government's Resource and Waste Strategy (RAWS) for England 2018 proposals and prepare for future policy and legislation changes</li> </ul>

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## Key Measures

- Increase the proportion of waste diverted from landfill to at least 90%
- County Durham to become carbon neutral by 2045
- 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

## Council Service Performance Indicators

- Overall satisfaction with cycle routes and facilities
- Linear kilometres of appropriate design standards for Active Mode Routes
- Park and Ride Patronage
- % of household waste that is re-used, recycled or composted
- Contamination rate of household recycling

## 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 economy, 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 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 want to build on strengths and assets in our communities to create the conditions for people to live well, so that our resources target those who need them most. We want our people to know what they can do to stay healthy and where they can go for help and support, to prevent more serious issues. 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

- Under 18 years conceptions rate has reduced from 41.3 in 2011 to 17.4 in 2021 and continues to show a positive direction of travel.
- 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.
- 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, and we are rolling out a healthy options takeaway scheme that will be provided free of charge to hot food takeaways across County Durham.
- To date (Dec 2022), we have achieved significant and sustained outcomes with 6,143 families and an additional 849 have maintained continuous employment – giving a combined total of 6,992 families turned around through our Stronger Families Programme since 2015.
- 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.

- Durham County Council won the Local Government Chronicle Children's Services Supportive Employer Award for 2022
- Durham County Council has improved and expanded services to children since its last ILACS inspection from Ofsted and is now rated as 'Good' overall effectiveness and 'Outstanding' for leadership and management.
- 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.
- Strong adoption performance
- Integrated Strategic Commissioning Team function for the county created, to ensure most effective use of resources, joint contract monitoring and improved quality of service provision.
- County Durham Care Academy created by the council to support and promote careers in social care, offering a range of courses from entry level right through to senior leadership and management qualifications.
- The Supporting the Provider Market programme piloted falls prevention interventions and supported wider rollout and mainstreaming of successful initiatives.
- One Touch Health system successfully rolled out to over 300 staff in County Durham Care and Support, ensuring that our care records are more secure and data are readily accessible and reportable.
- Great North Care Record delivered, for sharing of health and social care data between professionals and patients.
- Integrated pathways established with adult social care and primary and secondary care.
- Community equipment review completed, with revised and improved commissioning arrangements in place for people living in the community and care homes.
- Three of our regulated services rated by Care Quality Commission: Hawthorn House and Shared Lives are 'Outstanding' and Extra Care is 'Good'
- Finalists in the LGC 2022 Awards Public Health category for the County Durham Workplace Health Programme.
- Created the Protecting Health team to protect our residents through planning, prevention and management of infectious diseases and outbreaks, maximising uptake of vaccination and immunisations and preparing and planning for seasonal risks and public health emergencies. The Protecting Health team also leads the Public Health approach to vulnerabilities, and the emerging sustainability and climate change agenda.
- We administrated the £150 council tax energy rebate payment scheme which almost 93% of residential properties were eligible to receive

## 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.
- The cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately impacting people and families who are living in, or at risk of poverty.
- Smoking remains a significant cause of health inequalities and prevalence is to be reduced to 5% by 2030, meaning 49,600 must quit.
- Just under 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 17 percentage points behind national figures.
- Need to deliver on the Combating Drugs and Alcohol Strategy agenda to reduce harms from substances within local communities
- The numbers of children requiring the support of a social worker due to complex needs, which have increased during COVID-19. This is a national trend. It means ensuring sufficient local placement choice for our Children in Care and expanding capacity for short breaks is challenging
- The increasing numbers and complexity of children with SEND requiring wider support.
- An increase in the complexity of care and court of protection referrals.
- 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.
- The risk of an outbreak of an infectious disease could have major health impacts on people (particularly those who are vulnerable).
- Life expectancy at birth is 1.7 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.
- A quarter of the population in the county will be aged 65+ by 2032.

- 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.
- Alleviating a pressured social care and health environment following the pandemic, with challenges associated with workforce (recruitment and retention), service demands and a challenging economic environment.
- Implementing social care reforms, including Liberty Protection Safeguards; greater integration with the NHS; developing effective system working with the Integrated Care Board; Care Quality Commission regulation of local authority adult social care delivery; a new national performance dataset; charging reforms (delayed until 2025).
- Sustaining a diverse and robust care market, to meet a broad range of social care needs.
- Maintaining effective demand management, delivery standards and risk management, which includes areas of high demand or risk, such as hospital discharge, Mental Health Act assessments and safeguarding.
- Strengthening the voice of people with lived experience, by improving approaches to user engagement and co-designing strategies when developing services / practice.

## Council Contribution

As we transition from a post-pandemic world, we are focused on helping ease the immediate hardship caused by the cost-of-living crisis and preparing for the longer-term impacts. Our teams across Customer Services, Discretionary Benefits and Welfare Rights are experiencing high demand for support services and we continue to work with partners to deliver the various initiatives supported by the Government's Household Support Fund.

During the last financial year, we supported almost 55,000 residents (38% of whom are pensioners) directly through our Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) and paid a total of £4 million in LCTRS top-up payments. We also administered housing benefit payments totalling £114 million and made £1.2 million of Discretionary Housing Payments to off-set shortfalls in housing rental costs. We used more than £600,000 of Welfare Assistance Scheme funding to help in crisis with daily living expenses.

The council also continues to identify programmes to support our more vulnerable households as part of the Poverty Strategy, utilising Welfare Assistance Reserve funding. This includes working with The Bread and Butter Thing, a charity which re-distributes stocks of surplus food via designated community hubs, expanding the Fun and Food Programme for children from low-income households to include half term school holidays, supporting community groups to create a network of more than 150 warm hubs to

help residents cope with soaring energy costs, and providing grant funding for new boilers and home insulation measures to help reduce fuel costs.

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 over 20,000 gym or swim members and around 5,000 members on our swimming lessons programme.

Across our communities, we continue to offer free walking, running and cycling activities. From April 2022 to September 2022, there were over 6,000 attendances for our Walk Durham programme, 327 people joined one of our Run Durham 'get into running' courses and 22 people accessed one of our Cycle Durham 'get into cycling' courses. We also provide a wide range of inclusive and accessible community-based wellbeing activities and, from April to September 2022, we delivered 370 sessions with around 1,900 attendances.

We are also continuing to work with schools through the Active 30 Durham programme, with 80 signed up, and a communications plan will be delivered during 2023 to increase engagement. Furthermore, we will continue to actively promote and deliver the Health and Wellbeing Framework for Schools.

The council also supports service users and carers across a range of services, promoting good public mental health and the prevention of suicide, and helping people with their mental health and wellbeing, physical disability, sensory impairment and learning disabilities. At any one time, the council supports around 20,000 adults with a care package and 3,900 children through its social care functions and there are over 1,000 children in care and 450 children on a child protection plan. The council also supports a further 1,200 in early help services, as well as over 14,000 children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities.

The council also delivers a 24/7 community alarm service, Care Connect, to meet the needs of older people and those with additional support needs within our communities, supporting them to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. We also deliver disabled facilities grants to assist with the adaptation of homes to meet the needs of disabled and vulnerable residents.

## 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 continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects it has had on our communities and residents – particularly in terms of their physical and mental health, wellbeing and financial wellbeing. We are developing 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 continue to promote positive behaviours through becoming a smoke-free county and reducing dependency on, and deaths caused by, drug and alcohol addiction. We are working to improve the mental health of young and old alike, and will continue to 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.

## Priority Actions<sup>6</sup>

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- 2023/24
- Work with a range of partners to increase physical activity by promoting Active 30 in schools
  - Supporting the Provider Market programme, to help care providers through the changing, complex health and social care system
  - Ensure that people have access to reliable and timely advice and information, to support them to live healthy and independent lives in their communities, to prevent and/or delay the need for formal service provision
  - Review the approach to care home commissioning, taking into account changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and building on the results of detailed demand-modelling carried out in 2022, with the aim of ensuring a sustainable and high-quality care market. This is likely to require different commissioning approaches in future years.
  - 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 delivered through the Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022-2024
    - Grow our number of inhouse foster carers, support the retention of carers and work with IFAs to ensure that children and young people can live with foster carer families when it is in their interests to do so
    - Increase the number of adopters
    - Continue to develop and broaden our residential homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so
    - Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers
    - Improve our sufficiency offer for UASC and reduce waiting times
    - Broaden our short breaks offer for disabled children and their families
  - Deliver Actions from the Growing up in County Durham Strategy 2023-25, including
    - Working with the strengths and opportunities in local communities to develop a network of family hubs which can support the delivery of a range of local community support and services to children, young people and families
  - Deliver our Children's Social Care Improvement Plan, to ensure that we provide high quality social care services to children, young people and their families who need social care support

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<sup>6</sup> Those in bold are identified as major projects and are monitored by CMT Major Initiatives Board

- 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 recruit, develop and support a skilled, experienced and confident social care workforce and become an employer of choice
- 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
- Deliver the SEND Strategy Action Plan against its six key aims;
  - Where possible, for all children and young people to attend their local school which understands them and is able to meet their needs
  - To work closely with families to develop resilience and feel confident that needs are understood and met, and will continue to be met through transition
  - To listen to what children and young people are telling us when supporting them and to develop their resilience and independence
  - To identify needs in a timely way and have the right support available to meet needs at the right time
  - For all education settings and their workforce to be confident in identifying and meeting needs, and to promote good health and wellbeing and inclusion
  - To have a joined-up offer of support available proportionate to assessed needs
- Deliver priorities from the Education Operational Plan
  - To provide attendance support for schools to ensure that the most deprived and vulnerable learners are given appropriate and proportionate support to attend school and engage with lifelong learning
  - The majority of EY settings have accessed high quality speech and language training to enhance provision and outcomes for children.
  - Ensuring all educational professional support available to Durham schools, is current, relevant, and evidence-based, informed by partnerships with some of the foremost national educational research organisations.
  - The extension of the role of the Virtual School to promote good practice and achieve better outcomes for all children with a Social Worker 0 to 18.
- Refresh the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-25 to improve the health and wellbeing of the population and reduce health inequalities
- Develop and launch the 'Moving Together in County Durham' strategy to improve levels of movement and physical activity among those who live and work in County Durham.
- Review our approaches to achieving a healthy weight in County Durham and address identified need.

- 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)
- Continue to develop and increase engagement with the Mental Health Framework for Schools.
- Develop population level approaches to improve children's oral health through the development and implementation of the County Durham Oral Health Promotion Strategy and supporting action plan.
- Publish action plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Adults Mental Health Partnership
- 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', and collaboration with the County Durham Family Hubs model, our communities and stakeholders to change the culture of breastfeeding in the county
- To support the ambition to reduce smoking in County Durham to 5% by 2030, ensure that the redesigned Stop Smoking Service is effectively reaching people in our local communities, and participate in the delivery of regional tobacco control campaigns to support these ambitions.
- 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
- Work with partners and providers to reduce the incidence of falls and fractures in older people, through training and assistive / digital technologies
- Engage with stakeholders to develop, test and deliver future provider / partner / service user portals for better information-sharing and to streamline processes
- Target our resources on those young people committing the most offences
- Complete County Durham Care and Support Transforming Care capital projects for the Positive Journeys service and a new Hawthorn House Short Break Respite Care scheme
- Engage with users of our service, people with lived experience of health and social care, care providers and our partners to improve and shape our future service delivery, aligned to central government reform

- Continue with the Integration Programme of 11 Workstreams, prioritising Discharge Pathways, Quality Strategy, Enhanced Health in Care Homes, and Urgent Community Response
- Enable the delivery of homes to meet the needs of older people within our communities and support people to live independently for as long as possible *including through preparation of a Housing Needs Supplementary Planning Document*
- Deliver initiatives that support and sustain vulnerable people into accommodation
- Implementation of the new Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Strategy.
- Development of new services for Drug and Alcohol Recovery funded through Dame Carol Black funding to support further improvements in care within the criminal justice setting, housing, domestic abuse, and in-patient detoxification.
- Ageing Well Strategy delivered using a system-wide approach.
- Develop the role of local anchor organisations to increase good employment opportunities.

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2024/25

- Adopt a new Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy
- Deliver a range of risk based, targeted interventions which aim to ensure that all food which is produced, sold, stored, distributed, or consumed in County Durham is safe and presents no health risks to the consumer
- Development, learning and outcomes evaluated to inform the exit strategy for the uplift given to drug and alcohol recovery services funded by Dame Carol Black funding.
- Review and potential to recommissioning of well-being services.
- Review the 0-25 family health service delivery model to ensure the needs of children and families are being met.
- Map the County Durham food system and develop the County Durham Food Strategy.
- Further develop the role and remit of the County Durham Together service.
- Review Healthy Weight Development Plan

## Key Measures

- School Attendance including attendance vulnerable children

- Reduce the number of mothers smoking at time of delivery
- 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 in both reception and Year 6 who are of a healthy weight
- Improve healthy life expectancy and reduce the gap within County Durham and between County Durham and England
- Reduce the suicide rate
- Number of admissions under the Mental Health Act
- Increase satisfaction rates with people's experience of adult social 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
- Ensure all new housing developments deliver at least 10% of their total units that are suitable for older persons
- Ensure all new housing developments deliver at least 66% of their total units to meet accessible and adaptable standards (Building Regulations requirements M4(2))
- 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
- Domestic violence rates
- Child sexual exploitation rates
- Counter-terrorism self-assessment score

### **Council Service Performance Indicators**

- Number of Children Looked After per 10,000 population
- Number of Children in Need per 10,000 population
- Number of children on a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 population

- Number of children open to One Point
- Number of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan
- Number of children and young people receiving SEN Support
- Number of requests for an EHCP Assessment
- Number and % of our children in care who live in a family setting
- Statutory referral rate for children's social care
- % children's social care re-referrals
- % of social work vacancies
- Total number of connections on Care Connect service
- Total number of customers on Care Connect service
- Percentage of Care Connect calls answered within 1 minute
- Percentage of Care Connect calls arriving at the property within 45 minutes
- Number of Chapter Homes houses built which are for Older Persons
- Number of Chapter Homes houses built which meet M4(2) standard
- Number of Council houses built which are for Older Persons
- Number of Council houses which meet M4(2) standard
- % of households where homelessness has been prevented or relieved
- % of households where there has been an acceptance of the main homeless duty
- Number of successful move-ons from CLDA properties
- Number of applicants that were successfully housed via Durham Key Options
- Number of adaptations delivered through DFGs
- Number of visits to Leisure Centres
- Number of Leisure memberships
- Successful drug and alcohol treatment outcomes

## 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.
- A new adult social care case management system has been implemented which will help manage customer demand more effectively.
- Since 2016, the council in collaboration with a range of partner organisations, continues to play its part in the UK's commitment to support some of the world's most vulnerable refugees.
- Roll out of programmes and training to support increased awareness of mental health issues by staff and schools.
- Implemented a Selective Licensing Scheme that covers 42% of the private rented sector across the county; approximately 29,000 properties. The scheme aims to ensure privately rented properties in a designated area are well managed and in good condition.
- Durham County Council is the only local authorities to maintain the ISO 55001 Asset Management Accreditation for Highways.
- Our refurbishment of New Elvet Bridge has been recognised within numerous national and regional awards including winning 'Most Innovative Project' at the Institution



of Structural Engineer's Northern Counties Structural Awards 2021 as well as receiving a special commendation in the Large Projects category.

- In 2022/23 the council invested £3.47 million on town centre regeneration. This included purchasing derelict buildings and land and environmental improvements.

- 67 properties delivered at Oakerside Drive, Peterlee as part of the Chapter Homes Business Plan
- Through the work of our AAPs the council has allocated £59.5 million to over 10,000 community-based projects, leveraging £69.7 million of external matched 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.
- House prices have increased in recent years and there has been a drop in the number of properties in the private rented sector.
- 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 30.2% in

November 2022, 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 there are opportunities to improve east-west links.

### Council Contribution

The council is investing heavily in our town centres. New masterplans have been developed for a number of our towns and villages, free public wi-fi is being rolled out and investment in leisure venues. We are also undertaking actions and campaigns which focus on environmental improvements, better quality housing, road safety and water safety.

Priority: Our Communities

Not only are we facilitating the building of new high-quality accessible homes to meet needs, but we are also using our powers to improve standards across existing housing stock. During 2021/22, 1,671 new homes were built in the county of which 536 fall within the government's definition of affordable housing. We also used a range of tools to help owners improve, adapt or bringing back into use 3,496 properties, 155 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 covers over 29,000 properties, which equates to around 42% of the private rental stock. We are also working with communities most affected by empty properties, including working with property owners and landlords, to bring empty properties back into use wherever possible.

We have also provided grant funding through the County Durham Community Foundation to community groups to establish a network of Warms Spaces to help people throughout the winter by providing places where they can get warm, stay warm and enjoy a little company.

## 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. We are preparing a County Durham Design Code to help ensure that the design of new development 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.

## Priority Actions<sup>7</sup>

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- 2023/24
- **Deliver a programme of regeneration within town centres and wider towns and villages** *by encouraging footfall, supporting new town centre business, facilitating the reoccupation / re-use or clearance of vacant and vulnerable property*
  - Develop the care academy for children's residential services to support the recruitment and retention of staff in our children's homes.
  - Invest and implement a new SEND electronic casework system to enhance service delivery and outcomes for children and young people
  - Construction of a new bus station for Durham City
  - **Implement the County Durham Together Transformation Programme**
  - Extend the wellbeing approach across the council and within commissioned services

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<sup>7</sup> Those in bold are identified as major projects and are monitored by CMT Major Initiatives Board

- Complete Supplementary Planning Documents to support the County Durham Plan including Parking and Accessibility, County Durham Design Code and Developer Contributions
- Develop an ASB Action Plan to deliver the Safe Durham Partnership's ASB Strategy and key outcomes
- Raise standards across the private rented sector through continuous engagement with landlords, through the implementation of the Durham Rental Standard and the Selective Licensing Scheme
- Deliver a range of targeted interventions to improve housing and living standards including through Targeted Delivery Plans
- 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
- Provision of road safety measures along the A690 through the Safer Roads Fund
- Develop and deliver a theory of change programme for the Horden Together Partnership aimed at supporting People and improving Places
- Build community resilience and recovery to economic and social challenges and emerging neighbourhood issues by developing local priority projects linked to Area Action Partnership funding streams *including welfare reform, social isolation, Fun and Food Programme and regeneration of towns and villages*
- Co-ordinate the Council's activities to mark the Coronation of His Majesty the King
- Review the County Durham Vision 2035 to ensure it reflects the needs of communities and partners.

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- 2024/25
- Refresh the Safe Durham Partnership Plan 2023-25 providing strategic direction to community safety activities and support to victims
  - Develop a County Durham Connectivity Strategy to support delivery of the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy
  - Development and delivery of major transport infrastructure projects to improve connectivity across the County *including A19/A1018 Seaton Lane Junction and Junction 60 capacity improvements*
  - Continue to deliver the current Housing Strategy (including Targeted Business Plans) whilst developing a new Housing Strategy
  - Support the delivery of community housing schemes and neighbourhood plans
  - Deliver the Chapter Homes Business Plan
  - In partnership with regional stakeholders deliver the North East Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) through the establishment of an Enhanced Partnership and support schemes
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- Implement the Government's CONTEST Strategy review which aims to reduce the risk from terrorism and extremism, particularly in relation to Prevent and Protect elements

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- 2025/26
- **Review and transform library services**
  - **Review and seek to transform leisure facilities**
  - Delivery of transport infrastructure projects to improve rural transport links across the County *including walking and cycling schemes, and Bridge Repairs at Hedleyhope*
  - **Implement the next phase of Government's Humanitarian support programme.**
  - **Deliver the Council Homes Programme**

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- 2026/27
- **Deliver the Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone, Future High Street Fund and Stronger Towns Fund** *including the Eastern Sustainable Access Corridor, Bishop Auckland Bus Station, surface car park and Newgate Multi-store car park*

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- Post 2027
- Supply Seaham Garden Village development with geothermal heat from mine water treatment scheme
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## Key Measures

- Crime and ASB rates (inc. hate crime and alcohol related crime and ASB)
- First time entrants to youth justice system
- Reoffending rate
- Road casualty rates
- 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
- Reduce the number of empty homes in the County by 26% by 2035
- Reduce the average vacancy rate of our town centres to below the national average by 2035
- 85% of County Durham properties to have access to gigabit-capable broadband by March 2026
- Fly tips per 1,000 population

Priority: Our Communities

- 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 % of County Durham residents who can access employment sites by public transport (against 2021 baseline)
- 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
- Maintain levels of public satisfaction with highways maintenance above the national average.
- Maintain the percentage of respondents who agree that police and local authorities are dealing with ASB and crime issues in the local area above 2021/22 levels
- Increase net delivery of new housing each year by 1,308 houses
- Aim to increase net delivery of affordable homes to contribute to meeting identified need of 12,540 by 2035
- 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)

### **Council Service Performance Indicators**

- Number of businesses supported as a result of regeneration projects
- Number of properties improved or brought back into use
- Number of properties inspected in the private rented sector (including properties licenced under Selective Licensing Scheme)
- Number of council houses built
- Number of Chapter Homes properties sold
- Number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents – Number of fatalities
- Number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents – Number of seriously injured
- Number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents – Number of fatalities
- Number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accident – Number of seriously injured
- Percentage of timetabled bus services that are on time at scheduled timing points – service no more than 5 minutes late or 1 minute early
- Public satisfaction with ease of access

- Percentage increase in public transport patronage
- Percentage of 'A' road network where structural maintenance should be considered
- Percentage of 'B' road network where structural maintenance should be considered
- Percentage of 'C' road network where structural maintenance should be considered
- Percentage of 'Unclassified Roads' where structural maintenance should be considered
- Percentage of 'footways' structurally unsound
- Condition of structures on the principal road network
- Condition of structures on the non-principal road network
- Percentage of recorded Category 1 highway defects repaired within 24 hours
- Percentage of recorded Category 2.1 highway defects repaired within 14 days
- Percentage of recorded Category 2.2 highway defects repaired within 3 months
- Square metres of footway maintained and repaired over and above the core programme (against the 2021/22 baseline)
- No of ASB incidents

## Priority: Our Council

Financial uncertainty and unprecedented reductions in public spending have impacted the council over recent years. This is alongside challenges posed by a pandemic, the decision to leave the European Union, a series of severe storms and more recently a cost-of-living crisis.

However, the most pressing challenge for our residents, local businesses and the council is the current cost of living crisis which has steadily worsened over the last 12 months. Increases in inflation, currently running at 10.7%<sup>8</sup>, seeing it peak at its highest rate for 40 years. This has largely been driven by the rise in the cost of fuel and energy bills, which is being impacted significantly by geopolitical events, including the war in Ukraine.



The cost-of-living crisis potentially has a triple impact on the council:

- It has impacted on our residents. High inflation is outstripping wage and benefit increases so income is falling in real terms, and the stark reality for many low-income households is that they no longer have enough money to live on. This is driving demand for services which help those facing financial hardship or who are in crisis, as well as services provided to vulnerable people such as social care for children and adults.
- It has increased the council's operating costs. Premises and transport costs have increased in line with rises in energy costs and fuel prices, as has the cost of supplies and services provided by suppliers which face similar issues themselves.
- It impacts the council's income. As users of council services seek to save money, we expect income from discretionary services such as leisure centres and cinemas to fall.

The council is required to set a balanced budget so in times when spending exceeds funding, we may have to use our reserves or cut costs. Within our operating environment, the way we work has been developing at pace. The pandemic accelerated existing trends in remote working and automation, with more residents expecting digital services available 24/7. This required us to rethink the way in which many of our services are delivered, the culture of our organisation and the skills we need for the future.

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<sup>8</sup> UK Consumer Price Index for 12 months to November 2022, Office for National Statistics

There is a history of good partnership working in County Durham. Limited resource means it is even more important that organisations work collaboratively, focusing their efforts on the right things and working seamlessly across organisational boundaries. Our residents remain at the heart of our ambitions and their involvement in service design and delivery is pivotal to our success. We will continue to equip ourselves with the skills to be able to achieve these things and develop a workforce for the future. Delivering existing services in different ways and developing new services for the benefit of our residents will allow us to stand out as an excellent council.

## Achievements

- We have delivered £250 million overall savings from 2011/12 to 2022/23
- Over 100 council services are available digitally and more than half of residents access our services this way.
- We have started a major project to join together data from 18 of our major IT systems and lay the foundations for the council to become a more data driven organisation which will help deliver better outcomes for our residents.
- We have achieved the 'Maintaining Excellence' status in the Better Health at Work Award, helping employers regionally to address health issues within their workforce. 75 organisations are now signed up to the award programme.
- We have maintained the Disability Confident Leader status awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions, due to our commitment to being a good employer of people with a disability and support local businesses to become Disability Confident.
- We have, in partnership, developed a network of more than 150 'Warm Spaces' where people worried about their heating bills can go to get warm, stay warm and enjoy a little company.
- We have reduced carbon emissions from council operations by 57% since 2008-09.
- We continue to receive accreditations and awards for our work. For example, for our new mobile repairs app (APSE) and our E-Learning course for those issued with a littering fixed penalty notice.
- We have achieved the highest level of 'green' in the Investors in the Environment accreditation scheme. The award recognises our environmental management system, which is helping us to achieve year on year efficiencies and a pathway to net zero. We have also won overall Outstanding Achiever award from the Investors in the Environment Programme.
- We have carried out the second in a series of planned 'working well' employee engagement surveys to assess organisational health and wellbeing as part of our workforce strategy.

## Issues to address

- The council is facing significant financial pressures due to the present high levels of inflation, greater service demand, increasing costs to deliver council services and decreasing income from discretionary services
- The cost-of-living crisis has led to more households experiencing financial difficulties which is driving demand for support services to residents.
- Continuing uncertainty in terms of future funding settlements for local government and how this will be shared between local authorities makes financial planning extremely problematic.
- An increase in interest rates will lead to future increased costs of borrowing.
- Superfast broadband and the national rollout of 5G networks will enable greater digital connectivity for our residents and offer opportunities for new digital services.
- Durham County Council declared a climate emergency in 2019. Our targets are to 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.
- Workforce instability is increasing across the council, with local and national skills shortages increasing competition within the jobs market.
- Our partners, especially the Voluntary and Community Sector and some commissioned services, are also experiencing issues with recruitment and retention.
- 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. In addition, an ageing population across the county is reducing the pool of young people from which we can recruit
- The most reported reason for employee sickness absence within the council is mental ill-health and fatigue.
- Society is experiencing a technological revolution where progress is accelerating and innovations can be identified and rapidly deployed but we are finding it difficult to recruit staff with the right skill set to keep pace
- We, together with its partners, should seek to maximise the value of every pound spent and seek to deliver social value outcomes. We will deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes for our local communities by adopting a strategic approach during its commissioning, procurement, development and planning of projects.
- We recognise the need to manage the customer data we hold 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. We also need to

ensure residents are confident we will look after their data appropriately

## Council Contribution

The council both delivers and commissions a wide range of services. It directly employs nearly 8,000 people and supports many others through its commissioning function. However, to remain relevant and meet the needs and expectations of its residents and communities, we need to continually adapt, investing in both technology and the skills of our workforce.

We have an extensive training programme in place to refresh, update and develop skills across our workforce. Our apprenticeship programme remains integral to both workforce development and addressing current and future skills needs. Around 2.6% of our workforce is currently enrolled in the programme (both new employees and existing employees upskilling), the £10 million invested to date has supported almost 1,400 employees to participate (half of participating employees were new to the council and half were existing staff upskilling). In addition, 72 new apprentices joined our workforce in 2022. The retention rate for apprentices is 71%.

We provide a range of contact channels and have invested heavily in new digital technology in recent years. Although almost 75% of the 1.8 million contacts received through our reported channels each year is by telephone, more customers interacting with us digitally. Digital contact now makes up 22% of all contact, compared to 15% pre-pandemic. 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 169,500 unique properties now have an online account. In addition, just over 71,000 customers (around 30%) receive their council tax bill via email, and more than 76,000 residents use the revenues and benefits open portal to view their council tax 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 ways customers can let us know what they think of the services we deliver. We automatically e-mail satisfaction surveys to customers on closure of services requested through our CRM (available across 117 service request types, compared to 25 in October 2017), and after performances at our theatres and events. Users requesting services online are asked to rate and comment on the process, and we continue to review all complaints and suggestions. The pandemic impacted on our service delivery, ways of working and employees. It is the driver behind increasing both the demand and complexity of specific services, it has accelerated organisational change and changed the expectations of both customers and employees. The council continues to deal with its legacy. The council supports both the

physical and mental health of its employees. 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.

We continue to collaborate with local partners, to deliver social value outcomes across the county by the strategic use of procurement (the County Durham Pound project.) The project will maximise the value of every pound spent in the county and help to retain money within in the local economy, recirculating, creating employment opportunities and stronger more sustainable communities within the County.

The Durham Pension Fund has committed £18m funding to cornerstone the launch of the North East Regional Investment Fund, supporting SMEs across all sectors with headquarters or significant operations in the North East. The Fund will support economic growth and deliver a positive social and economic impact across the region, creating high-quality, local jobs.

Around 3% of the overall carbon emissions of County Durham originated from the council's operations. In 2021/22 Council emission equated to 45,704 tonnes of carbon; 48% from heating, 31% from electricity and 21% 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.

## Approach

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.

The expectations of our residents are changing with more people expecting to be able to transact with the council on a 24/7 basis and would like to self-serve online. We recognise that our services need to 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 decision making so we have a programme to develop our business intelligence capability and provide better analysis. Understanding our performance will 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.

The council declared a climate emergency for County Durham in 2019 and has developed two 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 3MW solar farm and battery storage project to power our Morrison Busty Depot at Annfield Plain. 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 are replacing all our pool cars with electric vehicles and have plans for the electrification of our service fleet.

## Priority Actions<sup>9</sup>

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- 2023/24
- 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 management and performance data by developing a range of business intelligence products**
  - **Implement the Council's response to the Community Engagement and Funding processes review**
  - Review the assistive technologies offer for adult care and develop a new Technology Enabled Care Strategy

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<sup>9</sup> Those in bold are identified as major projects and are monitored by CMT Major Initiatives Board

- 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
- Develop local action plans at a team level to address findings from the 'working well' employee engagement survey
- Develop an ultra-low carbon council depot at the Morrison Busty site at Annfield Plain

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2024/25

- Undertake a corporate peer challenge with the Local Government Association to help us identify strengths and areas for improvement within the council
- Implement the Investors in the Environment Standard, aiming to maintain the current Green Level of accreditation
- Strengthening our quality assurance and performance approaches in adult social care

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2025/26

- Ensure effective delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund

### Council Service Performance Indicators

- Days/shifts lost to sickness absence per full-time equivalent employee
- 90% of all requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations to be responded to within 20 working days
- Number of data breaches reported to the Information Commissioner's Office
- Service Access Requests received and responded to within 30 days
- Reduce the council's carbon emissions by 80% by 2030
- Percentage council tax collected
- Percentage business rates collected
- Average time to process new benefit claims (housing benefit claims/new council tax reduction scheme) (days)
- Average time to process changes in circumstances (housing benefit claims/council tax reduction scheme) (days)
- Percentage undisputed supplier invoices paid within 30 days
- MTFP targets achieved
- Unqualified audit opinion
- Percentage employed on an apprenticeship (new/upskilling)

- Percentage of employees aged over 50 years old
- Employee turnover
- Percentage of CRM service requests which are self-serve
- Percentage of respondents satisfied with overall service delivery (services requested through CRM)
- % of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks

## 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
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
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
GCSE	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

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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
ILACS	Inspecting local authority children's services which is the framework and guidance used by Ofsted to inspect local authority services for children in help and protection children in care and care leavers.
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
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
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
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

## Strategic Planning Framework

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

