

**County Council**

**28 February 2024**

**Council Plan 2024-2028**

**Key Decision CORP/R/2024/003**



## **Report of Corporate Management Team**

**John Hewitt, Chief Executive Officer**

**Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Council**

### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To approve the annual refresh of the Council Plan covering the four-year period 2024-2028.

### **Executive summary**

- 2 The Council Plan is our primary corporate planning document. It details the council's contribution towards achieving the objectives set out in the Vision for County Durham 2035, together with our own objectives and improvement agenda. It aims to provide a readable and accessible summary for members, officers, partners and the public on our priorities for the county and the main programmes of work that we will undertake over the forthcoming four years to help achieve these priorities.
- 3 The current Council Plan covers the period 2023/24 – 2026/27 and was agreed at Council on 22 February 2023. Our Council Plan is updated and refreshed on an annual basis together with our medium-term financial planning and budget setting arrangements and in line with best practice.
- 4 The Council Plan aligns to both the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan which sets out how our priorities will be resourced and the County Durham Plan which is a spatial representation of our ambitions contained within the Council Plan around housing, jobs and the environment until 2035 as well as the transport, schools and infrastructure to support it.
- 5 The Council Plan is underpinned by a series of strategies and plans and service planning arrangements providing more detailed information on

the actions, major projects and improvements which are being undertaken to deliver our priorities.

- 6 The council's priority themes of our economy, our environment, our people, our communities and our council together with the objectives contained within these themes remain unchanged.
- 7 However, more significant changes have been made to our performance management framework of which the Council Plan forms a part.
- 8 A higher level, more strategic Council Plan has been produced. This has been designed to give the reader an immediate sense of the strategic direction of the council and what we are intending to do.
- 9 A range of supporting council and partnership strategies and council service plans provide the detail of how we all deliver our priorities.
- 10 A refreshed approach to quarterly performance reporting was also introduced in April 2023 to provide greater insight into how our services are performing.
- 11 Consultation on the design and content of our plan was conducted from 23 November 2023 to 8 January 2024. This consisted of a short online survey of the public on our website with paper copies being made available in all our libraries and customer access points. The document was also circulated to partner organisations for comment.
- 12 The draft plan was also circulated to regular consultees such as the County Durham Partnership, County Durham Together, all Area Action partnerships, the voluntary and community sector network. The young people's forum, staff networks and the County Durham Association of Local Councils.
- 13 Individual responses were received from Durham Police and Crime Commissioner and from Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.
- 14 An analysis of the public consultation responses to the survey is provided in Appendix 2.
- 15 The following changes were made to the Plan as a result of the consultation responses:
  - (a) More detail was added about plans and strategies where further detail on what the Council is planning to do with hyperlinks to the appropriate documents.

- (b) An appendix has been added to the Plan detailing all of the performance measures used by the Council in monitoring performance together with links to the relevant quarterly reports.
  - (c) Further information has been added around our work with other employers as a Disability Confident Leader.
  - (d) Amendments have been made to the section on our wellbeing principles.
  - (e) Additions have been made to the Plan on the work the Council undertakes as part of its community safety duties and powers.
- 16 The draft plan was presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 15 February for comment. Feedback has been incorporated into the draft plan.
- 17 The draft plan is presented for consideration in Appendix 3.

**Recommendation(s)**

- 18 Council is recommended to:
- (a) approve the Council Plan 2024-2028 as attached in Appendix 3.

## Background

- 19 The Vision for County Durham 2035 was developed together with partner organisations and residents and sets out what we would like the county to look like in 2035. It was approved by Council and launched by the County Durham Partnership in 2019.
- 20 The Vision for County Durham is structured around three ambitions, namely:
- (a) More and better jobs
  - (b) People live long, healthy and independent lives
  - (c) Communities are well connected and supportive of each other
- 21 Each of the three ambitions contains a number of strategic objectives.
- 22 The tenet of these ambitions and each of the strategic objectives are adopted within the current Council Plan and supplemented by a number of other council-specific objectives to capture corporate priorities and what is important to Durham County Council.
- 23 The current structure of the Council Plan remains in line with our five themes being:
- (a) **Our economy** – capturing the council’s contribution to the **more and better jobs** ambition within the Vision together with the council’s agenda as set out in our Inclusive Economic Strategy.
  - (b) **Our people** – capturing the council’s contributions to the **long, healthy and independent lives** ambition within the Vision together with our priorities set out in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
  - (c) **Our communities** – capturing the **connected communities** ambition within the Vision and supplementing it with specific actions around helping those communities most in need of support.
  - (d) **Our environment** – capturing the council’s priorities and plans around a climate emergency and an ecological emergency together with our role in waste management, pollution, air quality and custodianship of the natural environment.
  - (e) **Our council** – capturing Durham County Council’s organisational priorities around effective resource management, creating a workforce for the future and making best use of data and technology to provide the best services to our customers.

- 24 The document sets out for each ambition, our focus, what our priorities are, our achievements, and what are the key measures of success.
- 25 Through our approach to wellbeing, we recognise that one size does not fit all. We will target support towards those most in need and help to build capacity and resilience. This involves working 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.
- 26 As a public authority, we are required by law to set equality objectives and these are reviewed every four years. These are also incorporated into the plan.

## Conclusion

- 27 The draft Council Plan 2024-2028 contained in Appendix 3 sets out our priorities, achievements, priorities and associated performance management arrangements for the forthcoming four years.
- 28 The Council Plan is the primary corporate planning document within our policy framework and constitutionally, requires approval by Council.

## Background papers

- None

## Other useful documents

- [A Vision for County Durham 2035](#)
- [Current Council Plan \(2023 – 2027\)](#)

## Author(s)

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Constitution of the Council sets out the policy framework of the Council which includes the Council Plan and performance management framework.

Statutory guidance for best value authorities issued under the Local Government Act 1999 require councils to demonstrate good governance including having an annual process for setting the authority's corporate plan.

### **Finance**

The Council Plan aligns to the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, which sets out how our priorities will be resourced. Any financial implications arising from the implementation of actions contained in the Council Plan are factored into the budget setting and MTFP planning processes.

### **Consultation**

The Council Plan sets out the Council's contribution to delivering the aims and objectives set out the County Vision, which was developed following an extensive three phase consultation where over 30,000 responses were considered, and which helped shape the final vision.

Consultation with the public, with partner organisations and key partnerships on a draft of the Council Plan was carried out November 2023 – January 2024. Details of the responses and changes made consequently are detailed in the report.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to set out equality objectives and review them every four years. The Council Plan sets out our equality objectives to identify and tackle discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

### **Climate Change**

The Council Plan contains a specific theme of "Our Environment" to elevate and highlight this important agenda and the work of the council in this area.

### **Human Rights**

None.

**Crime and Disorder**

Crime and disorder features as part of the proposed Council Plan.

**Staffing**

None.

**Accommodation**

None.

**Risk**

Risk management is an intrinsic part of the council's performance reporting arrangements.

**Procurement**

None

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## Appendix 2: Council Plan 2024 – 2028 Public Consultation Feedback

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### Public Survey responses

- 1 26 responses to the survey were received. A breakdown of the characteristics of the responders is as follows:

#### Status

Resident	62%
County Council partner	12%
Voluntary/community organisation	12%
AAP board member	8%
Elected councillor	4%
Other	4%

#### Gender

Male	33%
Female	67%

#### Age

Over 75	-
65-74	20%
55-64	33%
45-54	27%
35-44	13%
25-34	7%
18-24	-
Under 18	-

#### Employment status

Employed (F/T)	57%
Employed (P/T)	7%
Self-employed	7%
Retired	14%
Long-term sick/disabled	7%
Other	7%

#### Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

No	71%
Yes	29%

#### Religion or belief

Christian	57%
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Hindu	7%
No religion	36%

### **Ethnicity**

White British	86%
Asian/Asian British	7%
Black/Black British	7%

### **Sexual orientation**

Heterosexual/straight	79%
Gay or lesbian	14%
Not answered	7%

- 2 The survey consisted of three questions. Feedback is provided against each question.

### **Q1. Having read the draft Council Plan 2024-2028, please provide your comments**

- 3 The biggest category of response (8) was that the plan lacked detail such as specific actions, targets and links to new investment. The previous approach to corporate planning was that the Council Plan would contain a series of detailed action plans. However, our deliberate approach to this Council Plan is to go for a higher level, more strategic document with the detail being provided in supporting strategies and plans and a refreshed approach to service planning.
- 4 There were some positive comments (2) in support of the new approach to the plan and the inclusion of certain content. There were a number of individual comments on specific issues such as wind turbines, the Inclusive Economic Strategy, the removal of parking after 2pm and the wellbeing principles. These have been forwarded to the relevant service.
- 5 Some amendments have been made to the plan to make it clearer that specific detail is provided elsewhere, and hyperlinks have been provided within the text of the plan to the appropriate strategies. Further detail has also been provided to explain how the wellbeing principles link to the plan.

### **Q2. When updating the Council Plan, we have streamlined the document and made it shorter and easier to read, which we believe makes it easier to understand the council's priorities. We've also intended it to be more visually appealing through a new attractive design. Please provide your comments on how you find the document in terms of how it looks and appeals to you as a reader**

- 6 The majority (6) thought that the plan was easy to follow and not too long which makes it easier to read. The same number of people (6) felt that format and style were less important than content and delivery. Two people felt that the plan was not measurable. Key measures of success are contained within the plan. An additional appendix has been added to the plan containing all of our performance indicators and information on how these are monitored through quarterly reporting with a hyperlink provided to the page on our website which contains all of our quarterly performance reports. One person commented that there are too many documents to read to get an overall sense of what the council plans to do.

**Q3. Having read our equality objectives as part of the Council Plan please provide your comments on continuing with these objectives for the next four years.**

- 7 Three consultees believed that the proposed equality objectives were good.
- 8 Three respondents believed that the equality objectives could be more embedded within the council's overall objectives rather than being presented as a bolt on.
- 9 Two consultees were asking how these equality objectives would be achieved reflecting responses received to the first survey question about detailed actions to achieve intended outcomes.
- 10 One respondent was particularly interested about how the council was working local employers to break down the barriers to employing people with a disability. Further work is to be provided on this aspect of our work as a Disability Confident Leader.