

Council Plan 2025-29

Championing our economy, our environment, our people,
our communities and our council



Foreword

County Durham is a place like no other.

Our identity has been forged over generations, but our sense of pride is just as much about our hopes and ambitions for the future as it is about our history and heritage. The historic land of the Prince Bishops has become the home of industrial and technological innovation, economic reinvention and world class education, and our internationally renowned heritage and cultural offer has been recognised with our role as lead for culture, creative, tourism and sport within the North East Combined Authority.

This plan which follows the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government statutory guidance regarding delivering “best value,” sets out our bold ambitions for place shaping, by building upon the considerable strengths of our people and communities, our culture and our economy, to make County Durham an even better place to live, work, study and visit. It outlines how we will achieve our vision of more and better jobs, people living long, healthy and independent lives within safe, vibrant communities, a county that is net zero, and a council which is both efficient and effective.

Our plan for shaping County Durham and the places within it is based upon five key themes – our economy, our environment, our people, our communities and our council - with the aim of making County Durham a thriving, safe, caring, and green place to be.

And we are proud to say that we are delivering on our ambitions, a list of some of the key achievements in the past 12 months can be found in Appendix 2. We have invested millions of pounds in upgrading our road network, particularly on key strategic routes, and improved connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists through improved infrastructure on dedicated walking and cycling routes.

We are continuing to develop the Aykley Heads site and create a new Durham Innovation District where businesses will have access to talent, networks and resources within a setting that combines high quality infrastructure with a strong community feel. Relocating our headquarters to the Rivergreen Centre will free up the current County Hall site for development, and create a more sustainable workplace for the council. We’ve signed up our first tenant for the multi-million-pound phase 3 of our world-leading North East Technology Park (NETPark) in Sedgefield as we look to attract further investment into the area. And we’ve also supported small businesses through our retail start-up grants.

We have transformed our leisure centres with the introduction of state-of-art facilities and opened The Story, as the new gateway to the history of County Durham realising an ambitious plan to bring together five historic collections covering hundreds of years of everyday life in the county, and to create a new home for our registration service. The former Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Museum and Art Gallery on the Aykley Heads site is being redeveloped as a new meeting place and creative hub, which will offer high quality art and contemporary culture, including nationally significant exhibitions.

Our adult social care provision has been rated as good by the Care Quality Commission, while Ofsted inspectors have praised our support for care leavers and rated our new specialist home for care leavers as outstanding.

We've also committed to installing a further 250 more electric vehicle (EV) charging points across the county as part of our Climate Change Emergency Response Plan (CERP3), which includes 200 further actions to tackle climate change.

But, for all the county's great attributes, the legacy of post-industrial decline in areas previously dominated by mining and heavy industry can still be felt, and issues of inequality and deprivation are a very real challenge in many of our communities.

Our plan seeks to build on our strengths, but also address our weaknesses. It sets out how we will tackle inequality and discrimination, provide opportunity, and ensure no one is left behind.

Health and wellbeing is at the centre of our plans for the future, with a focus on the key public health priorities of reducing smoking and alcohol use, promoting healthy weight and supporting good mental health.

We also know that we must be ready to respond to unexpected events, such as the cost-of-living crisis and the impact of climate change, as well as planning for known changes driven by an ageing population, and growing demand and expectation for public services.

We recognise economic opportunities, such as greater use of digitisation, artificial intelligence and automation, alongside the move toward a low carbon economy.

We cannot meet all these challenges or leverage these opportunities to shape the county alone. To this end, we have built strong and progressive partnerships, forged on the sense of pride in our unique county. The County Durham Partnership and new North East Combined Authority are two examples of how we work successfully to deliver progressive outcomes.

This plan builds on the work of the council, our partners and our communities over recent years. It underpins the County Durham Vision 2035 and sets out our contribution to the collective drive to achieve long-term change across the county.

The plan shows we are looking to the future, working hard to achieve our ambitions and creating a resident-focused culture that actively listens to the needs and feedback of our communities.

Welcome to our plan.



Amanda Hopgood
Councillor Amanda Hopgood
Leader of the Council



John Hewitt
John Hewitt
Chief Executive



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Durham County Council Plan

2025
2029

Plan on a page

Our vision: A place where there are more and better jobs, people live long, healthy and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive.

Our ambitions

Our Economy

We want to create a sustainable, inclusive economy with a diverse range of more and better jobs that meet all skills levels. With targeted training and learning programmes tailored to our employment specialisms and the needs of our businesses.

We will deliver these new jobs, by developing our major employment sites and opportunity sectors, and developing our excellent tourism and cultural offer.

We will give our children and young people the education and training they need to access these opportunities.

Our Environment

We want to protect and restore our natural environment, including biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

We declared a climate emergency in 2019 and committed to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 and contribute towards a net zero county by 2045.

We declared an ecological emergency in 2022 and committed to address ecological decline.

Our county has significant landscape and ecological value and supports unique combinations of plant and animal species.

Our Council

We want to be an excellent council with effective governance arrangements, a good grip on our performance and finances, a workforce fit for the future making best use of the latest technology to provide an effective service and that listens to the views of our residents and service users.

Our Communities

We want our communities to be well connected and supportive of each other, with vibrant and accessible towns and villages which are well-used, clean, attractive and safe.

We will ensure our residents shape the places they live and are involved in making the decisions that affect them.

We will support our most vulnerable residents, particularly those isolated or financially vulnerable.

We will maintain a strong focus on tackling poverty.

Our People

We want to help our residents live long and independent lives and remain in good health for as long as possible.

We will protect and improve health by tackling the leading causes of illness and early death, inequalities and the challenges around mental health.

We will ensure a sustainable high-quality care market and invest in a multi-million pound programme to transform our leisure centre venues.

The County Durham Approach to Wellbeing

Improving wellbeing through community centred approaches that put people at the heart of everything we do.



We work together to achieve the best for people



We put people and communities at the heart of everything we do



We value, trust and support each other



We embrace change and look for better ways to deliver services

Our vision

A place where there are more and better jobs, people live long, healthy and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive.

The above is set out in the [Vision for County Durham](#) 2019-2035 which was developed with residents and partners. It sets out our collective vision and long-term ambitions for the county (see below), which is delivered through the County Durham Partnership.

- **More and Better Jobs**
- **People live long and independent lives**
- **Connected communities**

To help us manage our contribution to this partnership vision, we have a strategic planning framework.

The framework helps the council set ambitions and objectives from the highest corporate level to the bottom functional level. It consists of a series of plans which are aligned throughout the organisation (golden thread). At the top of the framework is the Council Plan (underpinning the County Durham Vision).

The Council Plan

The council plan describes how we will achieve this vision and our role in place shaping across the county. Written in line with the council's financial strategy (the MTFP), our plan is based on a strategic assessment of need using our intelligence platform [Durham Insight](#) as our evidence base. It also sets out how we will become more efficient and fit for the future.

Supporting strategies

These are key to achieving our ambitions across specific key areas, the county and places within it. Examples include Inclusive Economic Strategy, Climate Emergency Response Plan, Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Safe Durham Partnership Strategy, Housing Strategy, Workforce Strategy. Links to the relevant strategies are provided throughout this document.

Service and improvement plans

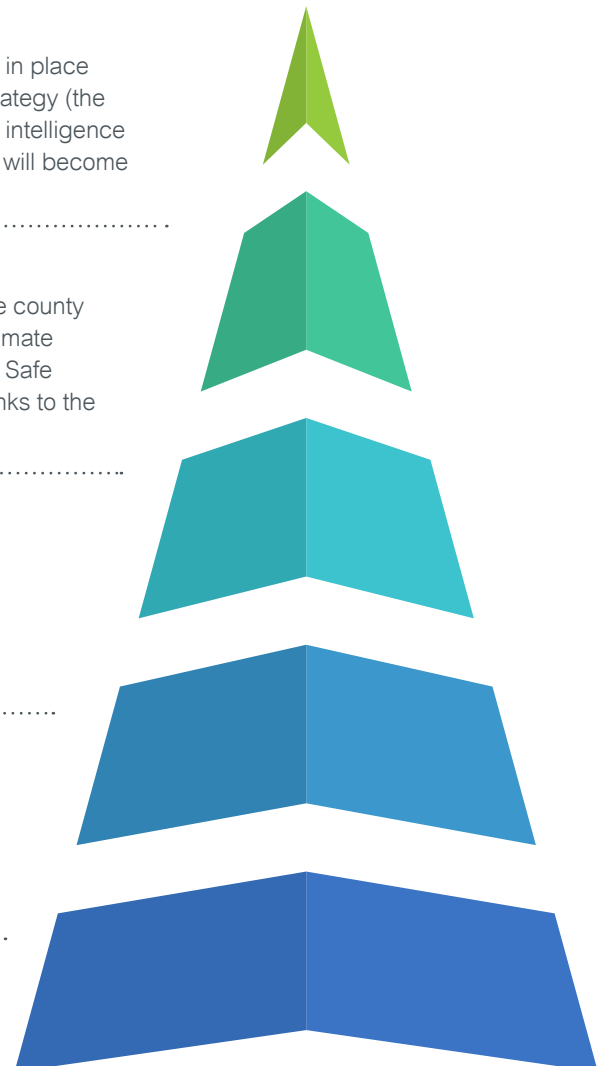
Service plans describe the role of each service in delivering the vision, alongside any plans to improve our existing high quality services and improvements across the county and places within it.

Project plans

Project plans contain more detail of a specific programme. Every employee is given tasks as part of the supervision process.

Teams and individuals

The annual Performance Development Review (PDR) process sets out an individual's contribution to achieving our corporate objectives.



About County Durham

The Durham Dales covers almost half of the county. Most of this area is designated as the North Pennines National Landscape which is one of the most remote and unspoilt places in England. With a stunning landscape and intriguing imprints of a mining and industrial past, the area is also a UNESCO Global Geopark due to its outstanding geology.

County Durham is a great place to live, work, study and visit. It is largely rural with some of the lowest population densities in the country. It also has a strong sense of community.



57% Rural area
7% Population
0.3 per hectare

32% Rural town and fringe area
37% Population
2.7 per hectare

11% Urban area
56% Population
12.1 per hectare

County Durham's major cultural attractions



Our fascinating history, local attractions, beautiful countryside, and coastal landscapes will help us develop and grow our existing tourism and cultural offer



1 Killhope Lead Mining Museum



2 High Force Waterfall



3 Durham Dales Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



4 Barnard Castle and Bowes Museum



5 Raby Castle



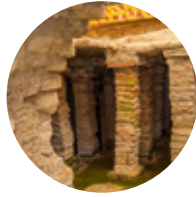
6 Empire Theatre



7 Beamish Museum



8 Tommy statue



9 Binchester Roman Fort



10 Bishop Auckland Town Hall



11 Locomotion



12 Durham Cathedral



12 Gala Theatre



12 Durham Town Hall



12 Durham Light Infantry Memorial



13 International Cricket Ground



14 Sedgefield Racecourse



15 Auckland Castle, Spanish Gallery, Kynren

Our county sits at the heart of the North East. It has the biggest population and the strongest economic connectivity from the Tyne to the Tees. There are fast and reliable transport links: A1(M), A19(T), A66(T), East Coast mainline, and two international airports nearby. There is also a local port at Seaham Harbour, major ports on the Tyne and Wear, and a freeport at Teesside.

Thirty years ago, the county's economy centred around mining and heavy industry. Now, the focus is green technology, innovative business and manufacturing, high tech opportunities such as NETPark, and a growing heritage, culture, and visitor economy. The county is moving forward. But our industrial past has left us with challenges around deprivation and inequality. Our county is ranked the 26th most deprived area in England for employment and the 42nd most deprived for income (of 151 upper tier local authorities, 2019). The levels of deprivation vary across the county.

You can access further data, information and analysis about the county and the communities in it at [Durham Insight](#)



© LNER

Key facts about the County (2023)



532,200
Our population has grown by 3.7% since 2011
18.7% is under 17
21.7% is over 65
(2023)



250,000
Households



22,199 (19.3%)
Children living in poverty
Nationally
19.5% live in poverty
(2020)



£10.6 billion
Gross Value Added (GVA)
the value of goods and services in an area.
Makes up 16.7% of the total across the North East
(2020)



14,475
Active businesses



72.4%
Employment rate for people aged 16 to 64
Nationally the rate is 76%
(June 2023 - June 2024)



£28,411
Average annual earnings, compared to an England average of £31,840
(2024)



£134,000
Average house price. The average price of a property in England is £302,000.
(December 2023)



4.4%
affordable housing, compared to 9.1% nationally



68%
residents with Level 2 qualification (five or more GCSE passes) or equivalent. Compared to an England average of 69%
(2021)



5%
16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training, compared to 2.6% nationally
(December 2017)



57%
Reduction in county CO₂ emissions since 1990
(2022)

County Durham has unique characteristics

Crimdon



Cauldron Snout



Killhope Burn



We have:

- A large and diverse county with some of the lowest population densities in the country: of 300 recognised settlements, only 23 have a population of 5,000 or more
- Some of the most remote and unspoilt countryside in England, in an area of great ecological significance, with nationally recognised dark skies ideal for stargazing. The North Pennines National Landscape, part of the Durham Dales is also a UNESCO Global Geopark due to its outstanding geology which can be seen at the magnificent High Force Waterfall
- The two main Durham Dales of Weardale and Teesdale take their name from the rivers Wear and Tees that both travel eastward through the county before entering the North Sea along the Durham Heritage Coast
- Dramatic landscape and seascape along the Durham Heritage Coast with beaches, rugged cliffs and imposing headlands, internationally recognised for its rare plants and wildlife
- Durham Castle and Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Durham University, a globally outstanding centre of teaching and research

About the council

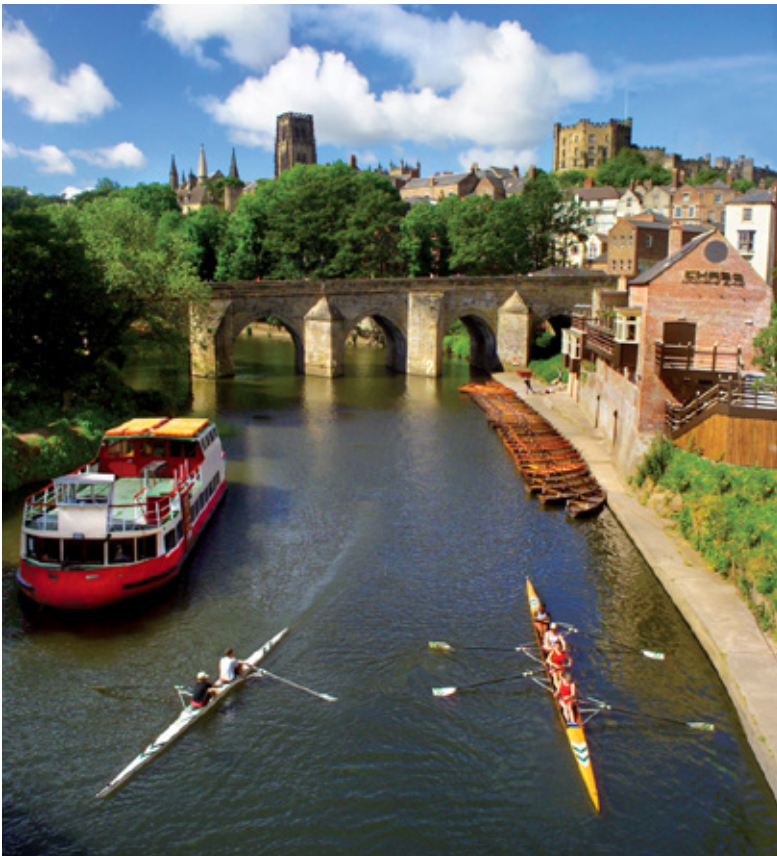
We have an annual budget of around £1.3 billion.

We use this money to deliver improvements across the county and the places within it. We also provide more than 800 services to more than 532,200 people.

Much of our activity involves providing leadership and working with partners to deliver improvements to places and services. The County Durham Partnership and North East Combined Authority are two of the primary partnership structures for doing this.

In our leadership role as a single agency, and in partnership with others, we create jobs, increase skills, reduce poverty, protect and repair our natural environment, give our children and young people the best start in life, improve health and wellbeing and help the vulnerable. In this regard, the council plays an important role in shaping our communities and delivering better outcomes.

Appendix 2 lists many of Durham County Council's achievements from the last 12 months.



Our Services

adult social care
adult learning
allotments
archives
bereavement services
children's social care
carers
climate change
commissioning
community safety
consumer protection
culture and tourism
customer services
early years
economic development
education
emergency planning
environmental health
environmental cleanliness
events
highways
housing
homelessness
leisure services
libraries and museums
local tax collection
parks
passenger transport
planning
public health
regeneration
strategic transport
waste management
young carers
youth services

Over the last 12 months we have managed and maintained:



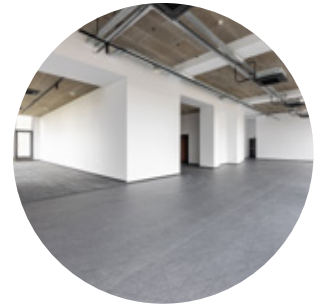
3,845 km of highways



487 road bridges



more than 83,000 street lights



800,000 square feet of business space



45 hectares of woodland



148 allotment sites



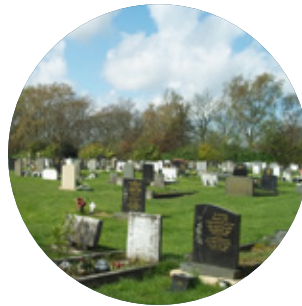
15 family hubs



12 children's homes



266 state-run schools



two crematoria
46 cemeteries, 96 closed church yards



Many parks, picnic areas, railway paths and nature reserves



3,526 km of public rights of way



14 Leisure centres



39 libraries



two theatres



one museum and two town halls

Over the last 12 months we have supported:



1,200 children in care



16,000 adults with adult social care



5,000 children with social care and early help



15,000 children with additional education support



3,050 older people with residential or nursing care



6,400 older people with home care, telecare or day care



57,000 residents with council tax reduction



18,000 with new benefits claims



8,000 households with housing or homelessness



5,000 people to learn to swim



3,500 residents with the skills needed to obtain good jobs



340 people to gain employment through Employability Programmes



1,000 businesses to survive and grow



140 new businesses to start up



A further 2,500 children to access free school meals



1,200 families through the Stronger Families Programme

Local councillors and elections

Councillors are elected every four years. The next election will be in May 2025.

They play an important role in the running of the council. They work across the council and partner organisations to improve the quality of life for people in their communities and help to decide how local services are provided, funded and prioritised.

The council's Cabinet provides an important place shaping leadership role. It is made up of the Leader of the Council and nine other councillors., Each councillor has their own portfolio, as listed below.

Cabinet members portfolios:

1. Finance
2. Children and Young People's Services
3. Adult and Health Services
4. Digital, Customer Services and Procurement
5. Resources, Investment and Assets
6. Economy and Partnerships
7. Equality and Inclusion
8. Rural Communities and Highways
9. Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Cabinet discusses and makes decisions about the council's policies and strategies, as well as countywide decisions and issues, which affect more than one of the council's services. It keeps decision-making close to local people by holding meetings in communities across the county

Councillors also lead the overview and scrutiny process. This involves developing comprehensive work programmes which reflect the issues which are important to our county and our communities. Scrutiny contributes to policy development and performance improvement through its review activity and plays an important part in holding the council to account for its performance in the delivery of services, shaping of places and both revenue and capital expenditure.

Councillors usually represent a political party but can be Independent. All Councillors represent all the residents in their electoral division.

You can find out who your local councillor is and other information, such as surgery times and how to contact them, by using:

- [Your Councillors](#)
- [Cabinet and the Leader of the Council](#)
- [My Durham](#)
- [Our councillors' map](#)

Working together

We know that building a brighter future involves everybody - residents, visitors, businesses, other public sector organisations, the voluntary sector, councillors, and council staff.

Working with others is central to our approach. And we believe that people who live, work, study or visit our county should be involved in shaping improvements to places and services including how they are designed and delivered, the more they are involved the better the product. This is called co-production.



Putting our communities at the heart of decision making will lead to better services for our residents and better outcomes for residents and places across the county.

Sometimes we will take a community leadership role to ensure local initiatives progress. Sometimes that role is taken on by another anchor organisation or partnership, and we will contribute as required.

We are changing the way we engage with the public and our local partners. In April 2025, a new Local Network (LN) model will replace the existing Area Action Partnership structure. The new model of twelve LNs will have a renewed focus on places, community development and enhancing the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in community action to improve their area.

LNs will strengthen existing partnership working across our communities and places, by adopting a more strategic approach to delivery of better outcomes. Focused four-year local action plans will guide local priorities and investment going forward. These plans will identify opportunities for increased joined up working between LNs, partners, and other Durham County Council services. They will ensure that the LNs help to deliver the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy whilst delivering improved community resilience to help us better manage demand for services.

There is a strong track record of working in partnership across County Durham, which is evident throughout our County Durham Partnership. The partnership is made up of leaders from key public, private and voluntary sector organisations who work together to drive a common purpose and ambition for the County to improve the quality of life for people within the County.

Supporting the County Durham Partnership are a number of Partnership Boards focusing on health, community safety, the economy, the environment and climate change and community empowerment. These

partnerships have developed strategies based on evidence from Durham Insight, alongside, local expertise and the voice of our communities to develop joint priorities for action. Our Partnerships provide added value by focusing on the areas that cannot be addressed by individual agencies alone with solutions delivered through a partnership response.

North East Combined Authority

The council is part of the [North East Combined Authority \(NECA\)](#) which was formed in May 2024. Led by an elected mayor, the NECA covers seven council areas. Its purpose is to unlock the powers and extra funding devolved from national government to champion the full potential of our region, the county and places within it.

We are the lead council for the culture, creative, tourism and sport portfolio which is consistent with our ambition to further develop our cultural offer and visitor economy.

The County Durham Partnership

The County Durham Partnership is made up of key public, private and voluntary sector organisations, that work together to drive a common purpose and ambition for the county, and improve the quality of life for the people within County Durham. The Partnerships Board has representatives from the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary, Durham University, County Durham Housing Forum, the Office of Police, Crime, and Victims' Commissioner and representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The partnership aims to promote and develop County Durham by linking local plans and strategies with regional and national strategies; providing strategic co-ordination for the area to avoid duplication and maximise available resources; using the ambitions and priorities in the County Durham Vision 2035, ensure outcomes are delivered by driving action plans; and working with thematic groups to collectively shape and steer commissioning and delivery of local services.

Our approach to wellbeing

Wellbeing includes everything that is important to people and their lives.

Put simply, it is:

'how we are doing' and 'how satisfied we are with our lives'.

It affects, and is affected by, our relationships; health (mental and physical); what we do; where we live; personal finance; economy; education and skills; governance; and environment. These factors change over time for all of us, and sometimes we need help.

Alongside services offered by organisations like the council and the NHS, we can often find help within our communities; provided by local people, charities, and voluntary groups.

The [County Durham Approach to Wellbeing](#) is based on the best public health evidence for improving people's wellbeing through implementing community centred approaches. The Approach to Wellbeing is

about putting people at the heart of everything we do and underpins our work to achieve the [County Durham Vision](#).

As a council, implementing the approach to wellbeing will mean that we make sure that:

- People can understand the information we provide whether that is digitally or on paper
- We understand and reduce the barriers people experience in accessing information and services
- We get better at listening to people in our communities and involve them as part of the solutions using their local knowledge and experience to help shape solutions
- We are more connected with communities by having two-way conversations and are open and honest about what people can and cannot have their say on or influence
- We begin to support people more holistically taking into account all of their needs and make every contact count
- We use evidence and good practice, learn together and share information
- We listen to and empower our workforce about where changes are needed to direct changes and support them to volunteer in our communities
- We have a healthy and supported workforce.

Our values and behaviours (the way we work)

We want everyone to experience the highest standard of conduct from our employees. To help achieve this, we have developed a set of values and behaviours and placed them at the heart of everything we do.

These will help our employees do the right things in the right way.

Our values, being outcome focused, people focused, empowering and innovative are explained below and are supported by a set of behaviours that we expect all our employees to demonstrate whilst undertaking their duties.





Our Plan



Our economy



We have already delivered £150 million of capital investment while helping 1,000 businesses to thrive and another 140 new businesses start up.

We have supported the most vulnerable through the Household Support Fund and low-cost surplus food hubs, as well as auto-enrolling 2,500 school children for free school meals, but we recognise there is still more to do.

We want to create a sustainable, inclusive economy with a diverse range of more and better jobs that meet all skills levels, with targeted training and learning programmes tailored to our employment specialisms and the needs of our businesses. We will deliver these new jobs, by developing our major employment sites and opportunity sectors, and developing our excellent tourism and cultural offer. We will give our children and young people the education and training they need to access these opportunities.

To achieve economic growth, we need strong educational foundations from Early Years to post degree level. Therefore, we have a sharp focus on working across health and education settings to ensure all children and young people achieve their full potential, and are equipped with the skills and knowledge required for the workplace.

We have a clear long-term vision for the county's economic future. We are using our place leadership role to work with others including national government, the County Durham Partnership, North East Combined Authority, businesses and other partners. Our Inclusive Economic Strategy is underpinned by short to medium-term delivery plans and a framework which guides and attracts investment that will deliver economic growth.

We want as many people as possible to contribute to and benefit from growth. We are supporting growth in all parts of the county by creating new business and job opportunities, and showing the potential of the county. We continue to help new and existing local businesses through a broad range of services, and access to business networks. We are helping people find jobs and advance their careers by improving their skills.

The county has strong economic foundations. We are supporting growth in sectors such as financial technologies, space technologies, and advanced materials. Our global university is expanding, and our visitor economy is growing. This is generating private investment, strengthening local business networks, and supporting opportunities in other parts of the economy.

Workforce health and connectivity are key challenge. We continue to work with partners to overcome barriers to work, improve local transport systems and broadband networks, and develop a broad range of jobs and business premises across the county.

Our aim is to create more and better jobs across the county and its unique towns and villages. We will do this in an inclusive way, working in partnership to support growth and diversification, enhancing our villages, towns and tourist attractions, and reducing carbon emissions.

Our unique landmarks, landscapes, and history are strengths. We will harness the social and economic potential of our distinctive communities, cultural and heritage assets, and develop creative ways to drive growth. We will promote the county, turn challenges into opportunities, and maximise the county's potential to bridge the gaps with national levels of performance.

Why 'Our Economy' is a theme of the plan

- The local economy has shown strong signs of recovery following the Covid-19 Pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, however there are ongoing opportunities for the county.
- County Durham currently attracts more than 20 million visitors a year, generating £1.2 billion and supporting over 13,000 jobs. There is potential to build on this and grow our tourism industry.
- Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita across the county has increased at a faster rate than other parts of the country, but at £20,173 there is still more to do to bring it up to regional (£23,251) and national (£33,976) levels.
- Although unemployment rates across the county are falling and are relatively low (3.4%) compared to the national average (3.8%), economic inactivity is worse than the national average and we want to address this.
- 30.2% of children in our county are considered to be living in poverty, which although similar to national levels, is still too high.
- Whilst the take-up of free school meals is increasing and is encouraged, at 31.5% the rate of children eligible for them is an indicator of need locally.
- Fewer residents are educated to degree level or above, compared to the national average (26.7% compared to 33.9%).
- 4.8% of 16-to-17-year-olds need further support to get into education, employment or training.

Our priorities

- A range of employment sites
- A strong, competitive economy
- A broader experience for residents and visitors
- Young people accessing good quality education, training and employment
- Helping all people into rewarding work
- Fewer people affected by poverty and deprivation



Relevant documents

[Inclusive Economic Strategy](#)

[County Durham Plan](#)

[County Durham Investment Prospectus](#)

[Strategic Place Plans](#)

[Poverty Action Strategy](#)

To do this we will

- Work with educational settings where appropriate to raise educational attainment for all.
- Support children and young people facing disadvantage to achieve the highest possible levels of educational attainment.
- Support young people and adults to move into education, training, employment and self-employment, prioritising those with the greatest need.
- Maximise economic growth by attracting new businesses to the county and targeting key areas of opportunity including research and advanced manufacturing, green jobs, life sciences and satellite applications sectors.
- Attract additional businesses and jobs to strategic employment sites at Durham City Innovation District, Forrest Park, Jade Business Park, Integra 61, and the North East Technology Park (NETPark).
- Encourage individuals to start a business in the county, while supporting new and growing enterprises, innovative businesses, and improving levels of business productivity.
- Regenerate and improve the vibrancy of towns and villages.
- Develop the next phase of the 62 hectare Aykley Heads site to create a Durham Innovation District.
- Deliver strategic infrastructure including road, rail and broadband upgrades.
- Promote the county to visitors, businesses, and investors.
- Support the development of visitor infrastructure including accommodation, attractions and experiences that delivers a year-round tourism offer which will create jobs and opportunities for our residents.
- Support the local economy and promote fair trading through effective business regulation to prevent e-crime, fraud, scams, illegal money lending, counterfeit and illicit supplies of goods and other unfair trading practices.
- Ensure a healthy and sustainable food chain for the benefits of consumers, legitimate businesses and the rural economy.
- Provide business advice and guidance to businesses and event organisers to promote better business compliance and protect public health and safety.

Our environment



In the past year we completed a three year programme to restore 247 hectares of woodland, improved recycling and introduced more electric vehicle charging points, whilst undertaking work to protect our natural environment through our nature recovery strategy and work with partners such as the National Trust and Durham Wildlife Trust.

We want to protect and restore our natural environment, including biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. We declared a climate emergency in 2019 and committed to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 and contribute towards a net zero county by 2045. We declared an ecological emergency in 2022 and committed to address ecological decline. Our county has significant landscape and ecological value and supports unique combinations of plant and animal species.

We live in a beautiful county. Large areas are of national and international importance for their landscapes and wildlife. We have a National Landscape (a UNESCO designated Geopark), a Heritage Coast, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Although the county is host to many important and attractive landscapes, habitats and species, our natural environment is under threat from changes to land use, land use management, pollution and climate change.

The climate crisis is a global issue, but we can act locally as a single agency and in partnership with others, including work through the County Durham Partnership and North East Combined Authority.

As a single agency we have provided local leadership to improve the county and places within it by declaring

both a climate emergency and an ecological emergency - pledging to become net zero by 2030 and to contribute to net zero county by 2045. We are also committed to stopping the decline of wildlife and habitats and be more resilient to extremes of weather.

We are reducing carbon emissions from our operations and have supported tree and hedgerow planting and peatland restoration across the county.

We are also working across our services and with partners to deliver actions that will both safeguard and improve the health and vitality of biodiversity within the county and on council owned green space and land. We are implementing a countywide Local Nature Recovery Strategy to improve habitat for nature and achieve wider environmental goals.

Why ‘Our Environment’ is a theme of the plan

- Carbon emissions have been greatly reduced in the county but there is still more to do. The council itself emits approximately 30,000 tonnes of CO₂ a year, but this only accounts for around 2% of the county’s total emissions so we must work together to reach our target of a net zero county by 2045.
- Despite progress improving the infrastructure needed for electric vehicles, towards the end of 2023, only 0.22% of vehicle registrations in County Durham were for ultra-low emission vehicles compared to 3.8% for the rest of England.
- 33.1% of adults in the county walk or cycle for travel purposes at least once a week, but we want to increase this where possible.
- The Green Economy in County Durham accounts for 16% of the county’s GDP and we want to further capitalise on these opportunities.
- Although 90% of waste is diverted from landfill locally, the county still generates over 250,000 tonnes of waste each year, of which 37% is recycled; we want to produce less waste, and recycle or reuse more of the waste that we do produce.
- With 6,000 fly-tip incidents recorded in the 12 months to June 2024 we need to deter this anti-social and damaging behaviour.
- Although the county is rich in natural beauty, at 8.5%, woodland cover is below the national average of 13%. We must also reverse biodiversity loss and protect our natural environment.

Our priorities

- A physical environment contributing to good health
- A net zero and resilient county
- Reduced impact of waste and pollution on our environment
- A protected, restored and sustainable natural environment



To do this we will

- Make the county net zero by 2045 with increasing levels of nature recovery.
- Decarbonise the council's buildings and operations to make the council net zero by 2030.
- Continue to work with and encourage all residents and businesses to reduce, reuse, recycle, and adopt sustainable practices.
- Develop infrastructure to make cycling and walking viable modes of transportation and encourage residents to embrace it.
- Improve the air quality across County Durham and deliver the air quality action plan in Durham City.
- Manage, maintain and improve our network of footpaths, bridleways and by-ways, allowing more people to visit the outdoors to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Implement and deliver a countywide Local Nature Recovery Strategy which sets out our priorities for nature recovery and wider environmental goals.
- Tackle biodiversity loss and protect our natural environment.
- Work with key strategic partners to replace technologies using fossil fuels with electrically powered equivalents, such as electric vehicles and heat pumps.



Relevant documents

[Air Quality Action Plan](#)

[Climate Emergency Response Plan](#)

[Ecological Emergency Response Plan](#)

[Minerals and Waste DPD](#)

Our people



Through our Stronger Families Programme we have helped numerous families overcome problems such as challenging behaviour, parental conflict, health needs, substance and alcohol support, domestic abuse, unemployment, housing issues and school attendance issues.

We have supported 150 people to secure employment in the care sector, which has helped reduce waiting times for adult care services, and our social care services for children and adults have both received good feedback from statutory inspections by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

We want to help our residents live long and independent lives and remain in good health for as long as possible. We will protect and improve health by tackling the leading causes of illness and early death, inequalities and the challenges around mental health. We will ensure a sustainable high-quality care market and invest in a multi-million pound programme to transform our leisure centre venues.

This is a complex area built upon systems which span public, private and community and voluntary organisations. The Council is committed to providing effective leadership and partnership working to deliver better outcomes for people and places. For example, through the County Durham Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care System, integration of health and social care services and commissioning, care market shaping and investment in prevention services.

Children are a top priority for us. We will work to ensure they remain healthy and safe. Our commitment extends beyond providing support to children in crisis; we strive to create a nurturing environment where all children can grow, develop, and thrive. Through family-based care settings, tailored support services and education and skills, we aim to help every child reach their full potential.

Good health is important. But in some parts of our county, people spend less time in good health and die younger than in other parts of the country. Also, more people have long-term health issues. Much of this ill-health is due to the county's industrial past and inequalities across the county.

Ill-health increases demand for our services. We are joining-up our health and social care services and helping our older and disabled residents live independently in their own homes for longer with a focus on prevention and early intervention. We are also encouraging healthy choices and want to create a county which is smoke-free, has low levels of addiction, and where people are a healthy weight and have high levels of good mental health.

We recognise challenges within the care sector and are reviewing our approach to commissioning. This includes expanding extra care provision and only building new care homes where we identify there is a need. This will help ensure a sustainable and high-quality care market.

We will make it clear what help and support is available to our residents and how to get it.

Why 'Our People' is a theme of the plan

- Although well looked after through our corporate parenting responsibility, there are around 1,200 children in care in County Durham, which is amongst the highest rates in the country. This includes 76 unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- There are almost 12,000 pupils who receive Special Education Needs (SEN) support and more than 5,000 children have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Requests for new plans are increasing with more than 80 new requests each month and we must ensure all of these children and young people achieve the best possible start in life.
- Over 1,000 children are being electively home educated.
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) predicts that by 2043, one in four residents in the county will be aged 65 and over, this will put additional pressure onto adult social care provision that already receives almost 6,000 referrals each quarter.
- Only 52.6% of our residents aged 16 to 64 and who have a physical or mental long-term health condition are in employment, compared to 57.1% in the North East and 65.3% nationally.
- There are more than 52,000 unpaid carers across our county, with an increasing number of carers in poor health themselves.
- Health outcomes vary across the county, so although the vast majority live long and healthy lives there are health inequalities that need addressing. For example, an estimated 16.5 per 1,000 adults across the county are dependent drinkers compared to a national average of 13.7. As a result, our alcohol specific hospital admissions and mortality rates are significantly higher than the England rate.

Our priorities

- Children and young people enjoying the best start in life, good health and emotional wellbeing, and a safe childhood
- Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will achieve the best possible outcomes
- Promotion of positive behaviours (e.g. reducing smoking and alcohol consumption, promotion of healthy weight and mental health)
- Further integration of health and social care services
- Tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities
- Support people to live independently for as long as possible in their own home - more homes for 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.

To do this we will

- Ensure a joined-up service for health and social care, improving health and wellbeing, with reduced inequality between people or communities.
- Help people live well for longer by making smoking history, enabling healthy weight for all, improving mental health and reducing alcohol harms.
- Ensure that all children and young people are protected and, if necessary, provided with safe and loving homes.
- Adopt the care experience as a protected characteristic.
- Deliver integrated family support through our family hubs and the Best Start in Life Programme.
- Improve access to welfare, advice and guidance to support residents whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Help people live independently for longer through preventative services, better use of technology and more homes for older and disabled people.
- Improve the care options available to people with a learning disability or mental health illness, and reduce high cost permanent care solutions.
- Ensure we have well-functioning care markets.
- Improve lives by tackling anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder that impacts on our communities.



Relevant documents

[Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

[Mental Health Strategy](#)

[Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy](#)

[Growing up in County Durham Strategy](#)

[Moving Together in County Durham](#)

Our communities



Through our developing Local Network model, we are strengthening the engagement and participation of local communities to help better shape our services. In the past year, local improvement programmes have received £3.8 million of funding through councillors' local area budgets, and we have improved local facilities plus ensured the safety of communities through Public Space Protection Orders and projects such as the Night Hub.

We want our communities to be well connected and supportive of each other, with vibrant and accessible towns and villages which are well-used, clean, attractive and safe. We will ensure our residents shape the places they live and are involved in making the decisions that affect them. We will support our most vulnerable residents, particularly those isolated or financially vulnerable. We will maintain a strong focus on tackling poverty.

Our communities, with their distinct identity and heritage, are where people live, work, and raise families. In conjunction with the County Durham Partnership we want to make them better. The county is growing, and it is important that that growth is sustainable and of benefit to both urban and rural areas of the county.

As a council we take seriously our leadership role in supporting the development of strong vibrant and inclusive communities. Through our newly formed Community Networks we will reinvigorate how we work with our communities to shape places and services to meet their needs. We will support them to identify local priorities, develop plans and support community delivery. We will ensure locally identified needs are met.

We are continuing to invest in our town and village centres and place-based regeneration while

respecting the landscape and natural assets. We want quality environments for people to live and visit. As more people move into the county, we need more homes. We also want private rental homes to be of a higher standard and more homes suitable for people who are older or disabled. Homes must be future-proofed to remain suitable as their needs increase.

We are shaping vibrant places by helping to transform derelict and abandoned spaces into assets that enhance the overall attractiveness and liveability of our communities. We are doing this by bringing more vacant properties back into use and regulating private landlords to improve housing conditions.

We are encouraging people back into our town and village centres and growing local economies through events, leisure, and culture.

Through our Leisure Transformation Programme, we are delivering a mix of new building projects and refurbishments to existing buildings to improve our leisure facilities where it is financially viable to do so.

Our plans will also introduce new activities which reflect changing trends and support the economic recovery of the county.

We will also ensure all our communities have access to fast and reliable broadband. By improving digital connectivity, we will open up access to more and better paid jobs across the county, particularly in areas difficult to reach by public transport.

To achieve our ambitions, we will maintain our strong relationships with our communities and residents, and empower them to shape their future through meaningful engagement through the new Local Network model.

Why 'Our Communities' is a theme of the plan

- Although the county is a great place to live, work or visit, the "Community Needs Index" shows greater levels of community need across the three domains of civic assets, active and engaged communities plus connectedness.
- The crime rate in County Durham is 102.1 crimes per 100,000 population compared to a rate of 80.7 nationally.
- Although slightly more people own their own property compared to the national average, only 4.4% of houses in County Durham are classed as "affordable" compared to an average of 9.1% nationally.
- To meet growing housing demand, 210 empty houses were brought back into use, mainly through negotiations with owners and 1,291 additional dwellings were completed across the county during 2023/24, however still more houses are needed.
- Through our selective licensing scheme we are regulating landlords and managing agents of 29,000 privately rented properties in areas that suffer from low housing demand and/or high levels of anti-social behaviour and/or deprivation.
- There are almost 5 million passenger journeys on the county's bus network every three months.

Our priorities

- Improve standards across housing stock
- Towns and villages which are vibrant, well-used, clean, attractive and safe
- Good access to workplaces, services, retail and leisure opportunities
- Communities able to come together and support each other
- More high-quality housing which is accessible and meets the needs of our residents
- Enable rural communities to become sustainable whilst retaining their distinctiveness
- Continue to reduce the inequality gap between our communities



Relevant documents

[Digital Durham Programme](#)

[Housing Strategy](#)

[North East Transport Plan](#)

[North East Bus Service Improvement Plan](#)

[Towns and Villages Programme](#)

[Safe Durham Partnership Strategy](#)

To do this we will

- Continue to develop place based working arrangements, co-producing, designing and implementing area based interventions to improve health, safety and wellbeing of the community, by building on our Area Action Partnerships and developing new local networks, supported by grant funding, to give our communities more say on local priorities.
- Develop neighbourhood interventions to tackle low level crime and anti-social behaviour, housing and environmental issues to create safer places, reduce crime and disorder and maintain community cohesion.
- Building resilience within communities against crime, disorder and impact from major incident.
- Work with partners to assess and improve the standards and quality of student accommodation and contribute to the development of a Student Wellbeing Strategy.
- Deliver a range of targeted interventions to improve quality of housing and living standards in the private sector particularly in areas of deprivation and health inequalities.
- Build more council houses.
- Reduce homelessness through targeted early intervention, making more homes available and improving access for our most vulnerable households.
- Continue our £62 million leisure transformation programme with a new leisure centre and library at Bishop Auckland.
- Deliver the Bishop Auckland Stronger Towns Fund Programme.
- Supply Seaham Garden Village development with geothermal heat from mine water treatment scheme.
- Work with our communities to encourage everyone to play a part in enhancing the local environment.
- Reduce environmental crime through improved intelligence, greater education and awareness, and tougher enforcement measures.
- Progress bus reform work to ensure that we get the right decision for County Durham and its residents.
- Continue investment in bus services tailored to our communities, with improved network coverage, greater frequencies and lower fares.
- Support greater digital inclusion through connectivity, hardware and skills.

Our council



The work of the council in the past year has been recognised through national workforce awards and statutory inspections. The authority became a Fostering Friendly Employer and was awarded green status by Investors in the Environment.

We have improved the ways customers can contact us and maintained high satisfaction levels for the services we deliver.

We want to be an excellent council with effective governance arrangements, a good grip on our performance and finances, a workforce fit for the future making best use of the latest technology to provide an effective service and that listens to the views of our residents and service users.

We are a well-functioning council. This means we meet the standards set by the government (Best Value Standards). This includes always looking for better ways to do things, finances in line with ambitions, service delivery that is both low-cost and high-value, and checks and balances that make sure everybody follows the rules. We have a [productivity plan](#) that sets out how we will improve and reduce unnecessary spending.

We are open to challenge and support from other councils (peer review) and external organisations such as CIPFA, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. We regularly compare our performance to other councils.

We are also resident focused. We actively listen to their views and place their interests at the heart of everything we do. Our new 'Let's Talk' consultation portal will bring our participation, engagement and consultation processes into one place, and allow us to engage with more people.

Our staff are our most important asset and we want to be an employer of choice attracting highly skilled motivated people who want to work with us. After the NHS, we are the largest employer in the county and one of the largest providers of training and apprenticeship opportunities in the county. We plan to attract and keep our staff through a range of staff benefits, modern-day working practices, training opportunities and career pathways which give everybody the chance to progress.

With increasing trends for remote working and automation, and more residents expecting digital services available 24/7, we have needed 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. We need to harness the opportunities technology is providing to transform our services, including the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence, whilst ensuring these services remain accessible to all.

Improving the digital accessibility of our services is crucial in building a highly regarded council. Through continuous improvement and responsive service delivery we aim to exceed customer expectations and guarantee a service that is of the highest quality.

Financial responsibility is our top priority. Our dedicated focus on effective resource allocation, financial sustainability, and delivering value to our community sets us apart.

We closely monitor performance and value for money, and achieve the targets outlined in our Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), demonstrating our commitment to responsible financial management.

Through efficient revenue management, we can maximise financial resources, maintain fiscal stability, and deliver the services and infrastructure our community relies on.

Why 'Our Council' is a theme of the plan

- Increasing demand for our services combined with limited financial resources means we must deliver services as efficiently and effectively as we can.
- To do this we must recruit and retain the best staff; employee turnover is currently 8.3% per year with 328 voluntary resignations in the 12 months to June 2024. 48% of those leavers had less than 2 years' service.
- Our councillors represent 532,200 people in 234,800 households, therefore our internal processes and procedures must remain customer focused.
- In 2023/24, we spent just over £828 million, we must ensure we achieve the best possible value for money and where possible spend locally.
- Each year, we must respond in a timely manner to approximately half a million telephone calls, 360,000 on-line contacts and 80,000 face to face contacts.
- More than 530 of our employees are enrolled in the apprenticeship programme to further develop the knowledge, skills and experience required of their role.

Our priorities

- Effectively managed resources
- A workforce fit for the future
- Services co-produced with service users
- Use data and technology more effectively
- A healthy workforce

To do this we will

- Balance our budget.
- Provide high quality, value for money services, using data and facts to make decisions.
- Use technology to make our services both effective and efficient.
- Maximise the benefits of the data we hold to help us drive better services and value for money.
- Develop a healthy workforce that can meet future challenges.
- Promote social value in procurement to maximise the County Durham Pound.
- Ensure the council is an “employer of choice” in order to recruit and retain the best staff.



Relevant documents

[Workforce Strategy](#)

[Apprenticeship Strategy](#)

[Digital Strategy](#)

[Medium Term Financial Plan](#)

[Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement](#)

[Risk Management Strategy](#)

[Constitution of the Council](#)

Our finances

Finances

The council has been required to achieve significant savings over the last 16 years due to government funding reductions and budget pressures. The need for savings will continue in future years as inflationary and demand pressures outstrip our ability to raise council tax and due to expected restrictions in government funding uplifts.

For a number of years local government has received one year financial settlements which complicates effective long-term financial planning and there remains uncertainty around a likely implementation date of the Fair Funding Review.

Council tax

Council Tax is based upon historic property values. All properties are placed in one of eight valuation bands, determined by market value as at 1 April 1991. The proportion of properties in each band varies significantly across the country, impacting upon the tax raising capacity of individual local authorities. Across England, 65% of properties fall within bands A to C, but across County Durham it is around 83%.

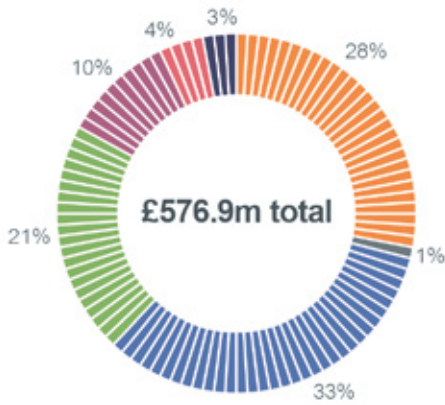
This means County Durham has a much lower tax base than the national average and is therefore unable to generate as much council tax as those local authorities. This means a 1% increase in council tax would raise an additional £2.65 million across County Durham but a 1% increase in more affluent areas with high tax bases would raise in excess of £10 million.

Government funding

The council is facing increasing demand and significant cost pressures and will continue to face difficult decisions on spending and service provision.

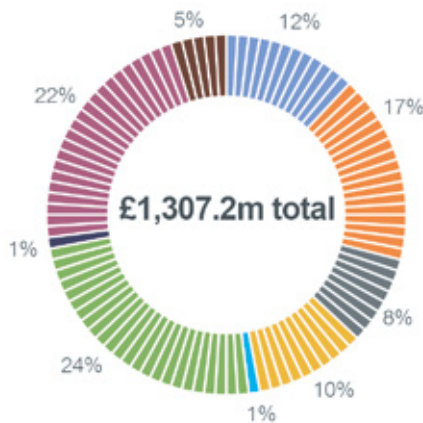
The current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) includes agreed savings of £5.9 million. However, we anticipate that further savings of £50.2 million will be required by 2027/28 to balance the books.

updated figures to be added in January



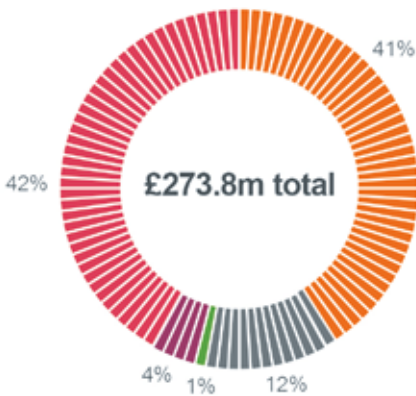
2024/25 Net Cost of Services

Adult and Health Services	£160.1m
Chief Executive	£4.6m
Children and Young People's Services	£189.2m
Neighbourhoods and Climate Change	£122.3m
Regeneration and Economic Growth	£54.9m
Resources	£25.7m
Other	£20.1m



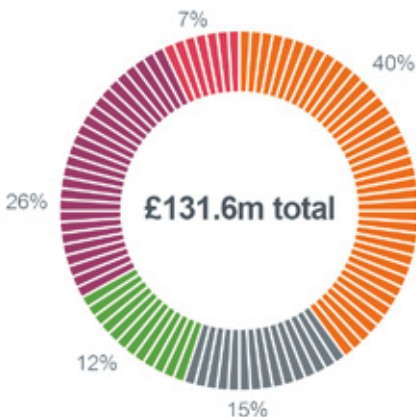
2024/25 Financing of Revenue Expenditure

Specific Govt Grants (exc. Housing Benefit and DSG)	£158.8m
Government Grant	£220.5m
Other Grants	£105.9m
Sales, fees and charges	£135.9m
Rents	£10.9m
Recharges	£313.8m
Other Income	£17.7m
Council Tax	£283.6m
Business rates	£59.9m



2024/25 Government Grants Budget by Service

Adult and Health Services	£112.2m
Children and Young People's Services	£33.1m
Neighbourhoods and Climate Change	£4m
Regeneration and Economic Growth	£9.5m
Resources	£115m



2024/25 Service, Fees and Charges Budget by Service

Adult and Health Services	£52.7m
Chief Executive	£0.5m
Children and Young People's Services	£20.2m
Neighbourhoods and Climate Change	£16.1m
Regeneration and Economic Growth	£33.5m
Resources	£8.4m

The council spends the majority of the budget in caring for vulnerable adults and children. Revenue expenditure covers all the day-to-day expenses incurred by the council to provide services.

Relevant documents

[Revenue Programme](#)

updated figures to be added in January

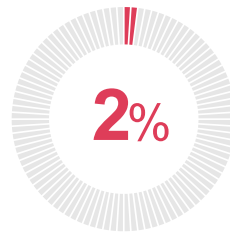
Capital spending

The council has a significant capital budget of £681 million for the period 2023/24 to 2026/27.

This budget is utilised in investing in long term assets which includes highways, schools, leisure centres, libraries etc. The investment normally covers purchase, improvement and repair in areas such as property, buildings or equipment.



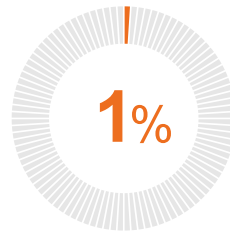
**Regeneration,
Economy and
Growth**
£402m



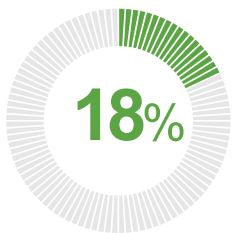
Resources
£12m



**Children and Young
People's Services**
£139m



**Adults and Health
Services**
£3m

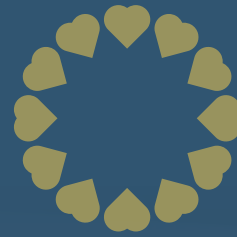


**Neighbourhoods
and Climate Change**
£125m

Relevant documents

[Capital Programme](#)

Equality and inclusion are at the heart of our vision and core values and we are committed to promoting equality and diversity, as an employer, in the services we deliver, in partnership and in the decisions we make.



We must ensure that the transition to a net zero economy is fair and just and that no communities are left behind.



Equality and inclusion



We will improve employment opportunities for disabled people

As a [Disability Confident Leader](#), we will continue to improve recruitment and retention rates of disabled people within the council. The Disability Staff Network underpins our approach to inclusion and has ambitious plans including the implementation of a buddy system to provide tailored support for any employee with a disability who needs this. Our employability programmes, such as [DurhamEnable](#), work with jobseekers and local employers, to break down the barriers to paid work faced by people with disabilities, neurodiversities, and long-term health conditions and this further supports our leadership status.



We will build inclusive communities

We will work with our communities to support their development and give them more control over the factors and decisions which affect their lives. As our communities have differing needs, strengths and potential, and we recognise one size does not fit all, we will target support towards those most in need and help to build capacity and resilience.

By working more effectively with other organisations and interested parties such as parents / carers and service users, to collectively shape services and initiatives that matter, means we are doing things with communities rather than to them.



We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture

We are committed to creating and sustaining a modern and supporting working environment for our employees and tackling inequalities, prejudice and discrimination. We aim to be an inclusive organisation, with improved staff engagement and effective staff networks.

Relevant documents

Equalities Policy

How we developed our plan

This plan was developed during 2024/25 (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025).

It involved asking people what they thought of our current plan, what they think we are doing right and how we can improve. This included people who live in the county, people who work for us, people and organisations who deliver our services (or help deliver them), local businesses, elected councillors, community groups, and County Durham Association of Local Councils.

We also looked at a range of evidence including:

The current and future needs of our communities.	Our communities are unique. With different needs and potential, they differ from each other, and others both nationally and regionally. We have lots of information on our online platform Durham Insight . And our Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA) describes the current and future health and wellbeing needs of our residents.
Data from official data providers.	Such as the Office for National Statistics which is responsible for collecting information about the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels.
Information from our communities.	Such as their opinion of work we plan to carry out or work we have completed. Whether we are meeting their needs, and whether they are satisfied with the level and quality of the services provided.
Progress against existing council priorities and other work areas.	Learning from what has been achieved, what has changed as a result, and what more is needed to move forward.
Compliance with relevant standards	A number of statutory and non-statutory organisations, such as Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and the Local government Association all help local authorities continually improve their performance. Self-evaluation against recognised standards and feedback from inspections, be they statutory or peer support, all help identify areas for improvement.
Best Value Standards	We have referred to the statutory guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure the plan meets the criteria needed to be a well-functioning council in relation to planning and continuous improvements.

We want to provide high standards of service in all we do. By listening to our customers and taking action we can improve our services and meet customer needs.

Have your say

[Send us a compliment or make a suggestion](#)

[Make a complaint](#)

[Respond to consultations](#)

[Ask a question at council meetings](#)

How we measure our success

The council uses and publishes a wide range of performance information to monitor progress against the ambitions and priorities set out in this plan.

This data includes a range of primary indicators (headline measures that we use to monitor progress towards our objectives) which are supported by more detailed secondary indicators. The list in Appendix 1 shows the main performance information used to measure progress against this plan, however the list is not exhaustive and other data items may be used as required to identify issues and monitor progress.

During 2025/26, we will set targets for the primary indicators based on local and national performance. This will help us drive continuous improvement and deliver well performing services.

Performance is reported and shared publicly through the quarterly Corporate Performance Report, the latest version of which can be found at the link below. This report includes performance data from other councils where available, so our performance can be compared to regional and national figures.

Other data that gives an indication of the situation in the county, but isn't really a reflection of the performance of the council alone, such as employment figures, value of gross value added (the value of goods and services produced across the county) and average house prices, will also be used to identify and prioritise further work.

Furthermore, information from statutory inspections, such as those undertaken by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted, plus the findings of our external auditors and peer inspections also provides useful feedback as to how the council is performing. This process provides assurance by clearly identifying further actions that need to be taken by the authority to continuously improve performance and how we operate.

Major projects and initiatives, for example those with large capital spend or significant community impact are overseen by dedicated internal boards and assurance processes. Key decisions are approved by Cabinet and progress monitored and reported accordingly.

Relevant Documents

[Corporate Performance Reports](#)

Appendix 1: Our measures of success



Primary Indicators

- Planning applications determined on time
- Planning applications overturned on appeal
- New businesses supported by the council
- Jobs created or safeguarded
- Tourism businesses actively engaged with Visit County Durham
- Employability programmes attendance and outcomes

Secondary Indicators

- Inward investments secured
- Investment secured for companies
- Occupancy of Business Durham floor space
- Businesses engaged by Business Durham
- Businesses supported by regeneration projects
- Government funded childcare
- People attending cultural festivals events run and commissioned by Culture, Sport and Tourism
- People attending council owned cultural venues
- Average occupancy and yield at Gala Durham, Empire Consett and Bishop Auckland Town Hall of (a) cinema screenings, and (b) theatre performances
- Council owned/managed heritage assets 'at risk'
- People attending libraries
- Library borrowers

Wider Indicators of Success

- GVA per filled job
- Employment rate
- Children meeting expected standards in maths and reading at Key Stage 2
- Percentage achieving GCSE English and Maths to a Grade 5
- Disadvantaged cohorts meeting basic threshold measures in English and Maths
- Number of jobs
- Number of businesses
- Young people in education, employment and training
- Residents with higher level skills
- 16-17-year-olds in an apprenticeship
- Employment land approved and delivered
- Visitors to the county
- Money generated and jobs supported by the visitor economy
- Visitor attractions served by public transport

Our environment

Primary Indicators

- Household waste re-used, recycled or composted
- Waste diverted from landfill
- Contamination rate (all household waste)
- Council's carbon emissions
- Park and Ride passenger journeys
- Council electric vehicle charge points publicly accessible

Secondary Indicators

- Satisfaction with cycle routes & facilities
- Nitrogen dioxide levels within Durham City Air Quality Management Area

Wider Indicators of Success

- County Durham to become net zero by 2045
- Cycling and walking levels
- Woodland Creation
- Residual household waste (kg per household)

Our people

Primary Indicators

- Children's social care re-referrals
- Children in care in a family setting
- Families on our Stronger Families Programme attaining significant and sustained outcomes
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieving a good level of development
- Family Hub registration
- Pupils attending a school judged 'good or better' by Ofsted
- Education Health and Care Plans completed on time
- Pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan attending a mainstream school
- Satisfaction of carers with adult social care services
- Adults aged 65+ admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care
- Social care providers rated good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission.
- Quality of life of a) social care users, and b) carers
- Adult social care requests resulting in a service
- Outcome of short-term services
- Turnover rate - adult social care
- Ease of finding information for adult social care
- Households prevented from homelessness
- Households where homelessness has been relieved
- Households where there has been an acceptance of the main homeless duty
- Smoking quitters at four weeks
- Successful completions - alcohol
- Care Connect calls and response rates
- Potential clients contacted within 3 weeks of initial referral for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
- Successful move-ons from council managed support accommodation
- Visits to Leisure Centres
- THRIVE memberships

Secondary Indicators

- Early help cases open
- Children's social care referral rate
- Children's social care assessments completed on time
- Children in need rate
- Child protection plan rate
- Children looked after rate
- Care leavers aged 16-24
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as a percentage of all children in care
- Social worker vacancies
- Children who are electively home educated
- Eligibility for, and take-up of, free school meals
- Children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan
- Pupils receiving Special Education Needs support
- Care Act assessments completed
- Adult social care service users assessed or reviewed in the last 12 months
- Care Connect customers
- Service users receiving (a) home care, (b) telecare, (c) day care and d) direct payments
- People living in temporary accommodation
- MOVE memberships
- Participation and completion in Wellbeing for Life programmes

Wider Indicators of Success

- Approvals on new housing sites meeting
 - a) accessible and adaptable standards
 - b) a design and type for older persons
- Mothers smoking at time of delivery
- People accessing stop smoking service

Our communities

Primary Indicators

- Roads where maintenance is recommended
- 'Footways' structurally unsound
- Bridge condition
- Highway defects repaired Satisfaction with highways maintenance
- Empty homes brought back into use
- Selective Licence Scheme outcomes
- Chapter Homes properties sold
- Fly-tipping rate

Secondary Indicators

- Acceptable levels of cleanliness
- Harbour Service (Domestic Abuse) outcomes
- Children and young people reviewed as at risk to Child Sexual Exploitation
- Anti-social behaviour rate
- Service satisfaction of victims and complainants of anti-social behaviour
- Anti-social behaviour case review referrals and appeals

Wider Indicators of Success

- Properties with access to gigabit-capable broadband
- Net affordable homes
- Net additional dwellings
- Town centre vacancy rate
- Satisfaction with ease of access
- Satisfaction with bus operators
- Households using public transport which can access (a) key service locations (b) employment sites
- Bus services on time
- Local passenger journeys on public transport
- Road Traffic Collisions and fatalities
- Rate of domestic abuse incidents reported to the Police

Our council

Primary Indicators

- Council tax collected
- Business rates collected
- Time to process claims and changes of circumstances for (a) housing benefit, (b) council tax reduction

Secondary Indicators

- Statement of accounts
- Non-ringfenced reserves
- Discretionary Housing Payment spend
- Invoices paid within 30 days
- Customer contact that is digital
- Telephone calls answered within 3 minutes
- Service requests meeting performance standard
- Complaints received and upheld
- Data breaches
- Top 5% of earners - female
- Employees aged 50 years or over
- Employee turnover
- Performance Development Reviews completed
- Managers' training programme - completion rate
- Employees on apprenticeship programme
- Apprentice levy utilised
- Apprentice retention rate
- Sickness Rate
- Employee accidents work-related ill-health

Wider Indicators of Success

- Core spending power per dwelling
- Band D council tax rate
- Council tax revenue per dwelling
- Social care spend as a % of core spending power
- Debt servicing as % of core spending power
- Total debt as % of core spending power

Appendix 2: Our achievements

Our economy

- Delivered more than £150 million of capital investment.
- Doubled the size of NETPark, one of the UK's leading science parks, with a £62 million investment. A further £36 million investment is to follow.
- Helped 1,000 businesses survive, grow and succeed.
- Enabled 140 new start-up businesses to develop.
- Invested £7 million in our communities through the Towns and Villages Programme.
- Provided more than 3,500 residents with the skills to obtain good jobs and careers.
- Opened The Story, a new state of the art cultural venue that is a gateway to the history of our county and its people, and home to the County Register Office.
- Delivered projects to reduce poverty using £1 million of UK Shared Prosperity Funding.
- Supported vulnerable / disadvantaged households using the Household Support fund (funded by central government) - £40 million spent since 2021. And provided ongoing financial support through Discretionary Housing Payments, Welfare Assistance, and engagement through the Advice in County Durham Partnership.
- Increased our low cost surplus food hubs (The Bread and Butter Thing) to 20.
- Auto-enrolled 2,500 primary and secondary school children for free school meals.
- Extended Pension Credit, and therefore the Winter Fuel Allowance, to more than 2,000 pensioners.
- Created more spaces at Sniperley Park and Ride, and expanded the service from Belmont and Sniperley.
- Delivered the Bishop Auckland Heritage Action Zone and the Future High Street Fund using major government investment.
- Improved the layout of roads at a number of key sites.
- Improved the visitor experience at Locomotion in Shildon.
- Supported more young people with an Education Health and Care Plan to move into education, employment and training through DurhamWorks and / or DurhamEnable.
- Supported young people in Year 11 identified as least likely to move into education, employment or training to progress into post-16 education, employment or training through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools.
- Introduced more paid work experience placements across the council for 'care-experienced' young people and more Supported Internships across the county for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Driven by DurhamWorks, DurhamLearn and DurhamEnable.
- Introduced network-wide bus tickets, capped bus fares and free bus travel for eligible care leavers. Launched Link2work to help people who work shifts get to work.
- Reduced the burden of regulation on local businesses and improved business compliance through 'Better Business for All' advice and support.

Our environment

- Restored and reconnected 247 hectares of woodland through the three-year woodland revival project.
- Rolled out additional recycling points for a range of new materials including small electrical appliances, coffee pods, medical equipment and vapes.
- Improved the contamination rate of recycling collecting from the kerbside through dedicated campaigning seeking behaviour change.
- Installed the first net zero asphalt road surface in Durham City using technology and specialist aggregates developed in the county.
- Trialled 'NightTune' nature friendly street lighting and solar powered street lighting in remote areas.
- Created a 19 kilometre walking and cycling route alongside the Stockton and Darlington Railway.
- Upgraded the council's estate and operations to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. The council received over £4 million of government decarbonisation grant to bring improvements to the public estate.
- Improved public rights of way including routes at Hardwick Park, the Dene to Medomsley, Bearpark to Brandon and across the Durham City Green Corridor.
- Secured over £4.3 million to install 250 additional electric vehicle charge points, adding to more than 150 charge points already installed.
- Taken on Responsible Authority status for our statutory local nature recovery strategy which will be published in 2025.
- Piloted new infrastructure to allow householders who do not have off-street parking to charge electric vehicles at home.
- Established a network of repair cafés to help repair and reuse electrical and other items to reduce waste.
- Initiated a £1 million project with the National Trust and Durham Wildlife Trust to create and restore the wildflower-rich Magnesian Limestone grasslands along the county's coastline from Noses Point to Horden.
- Worked in partnership with the National Trust to help develop the Durham City Green Corridor landscape project following the line of the River Wear between Crook Hall and Finchale.
- Brought to a successful close the three year 'Seascapes' initiative, working in collaboration to help reveal and manage the natural, built and cultural heritage of our unique coast.
- Peatland restoration in the North Pennines National Landscape continues to deliver landscape and climate benefits.
- Supported volunteering opportunities across our environment through our countryside estate, It's Your Neighbourhood and Big Spring Clean.



Our people

- Adult social care services were rated as 'good' by the Care Quality Commission.
- Shorter waiting times across adult care services and more service users receiving timely reviews.
- Supported more than 150 people into employment in the care sector through our Care Academy.
- Transformed our mental health service and helped more people with additional social care needs. Provided local communities with £140,000 of funding for targeted mental health and wellbeing support.
- Introduced a new breakthrough service helping vulnerable adults with hoarding and self-neglect behaviours.
- Received positive feedback from Ofsted's inspection of the local area partnership for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services which found many key strengths and effective practices.
- Opened two new children's home plus an edge of care home to help prevent young people going into care.
- Helped families overcome problems such as challenging behaviour, parental conflict, health needs, substance and alcohol support, domestic abuse, unemployment, housing issues and school attendance issues through our [Stronger Families Programme](#).



Our communities

- Strengthened engagement and participation through a new Local Network model with greater focus on the impact of local investment funding.
- Invested £3.8 million of local area and councillors' budgets on local improvement programmes.
- Refurbished leisure centres at Peterlee, Spennymoor, Teesdale and Stanley to reduce carbon emissions and improve the customer experience.
- Expanded gigabit-capable broadband across the county through the Digital Durham Programme.
- Co-funded the countywide network of welcome spaces which help combat poverty, isolation and loneliness within our communities.
- Acquired 144 properties to help families and individuals who have lost their homes.
- Installed Changing Places toilets at Locomotion, Raby Castle, Teesdale Leisure Centre, Hardwick Park and the Dunes Café at Crimdon.
- Delivered our annual events programme including Brass, Durham Book Festival, our food festivals, Pride, Holocaust Memorial Day and International Women's Day.
- Closed retail premises involved in the illicit supply of alcohol and tobacco (including vapes).
- Introduced a Public Space Protection Order in Durham City to reduce anti-social behaviour.
- Received national recognition, as part of the Horden Together Partnership, from the Local Government Association for effective community engagement, and a Commendation from the Municipal Journal for its approach to reducing health inequalities.
- Delivered the Night Hub, which promotes the Safety of Women and Girls at Night (SWAN) and provides a safe refuge, guardianship and support service for everybody.



Our council

- Became a Fostering Friendly Employer.
- Won the 'Back Office Heroes' award at the LGC Workforce Awards for our 'Grow your Own' Apprenticeship programme.
- Short-listed at the LGC Workforce Awards for the 'Best Next Generation Employer' and 'Workforce Innovator'.
- Reduced vacancies across children's social work by improving recruitment, retention and resilience arrangements.
- Provided more lower cost, accessible options for customers to contact us. Maintained high satisfaction levels for service delivery.
- Extended our County Durham Pound Project, which maximises social value through our tendering processes, to the private and third sector organisations.
- Encouraged more local organisations to join the National Databank network which provides free SIM cards to help people access the internet.
- Increased the membership of our staff networks - more than 500 employees are involved in the disability, LGBT+, menopause, race, carers and armed forces networks.
- Awarded Green status, the highest level of accreditation, by the independent Investors in the Environment.
- Opened our first Low Carbon Depot at Morrison Busty, Annfield Plain which now runs entirely off gas and powered by an on-site solar farm.
- Recycled more than 2,700 computers used by the council, with 400 being used by local schools.

