

Cabinet

12 March 2025

County Durham Partnership Update

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

John Hewitt, Chief Executive

Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Council

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships

Electoral division affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership (CDP), which includes the CDP Board, Forum, Thematic Partnerships and Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) across the county.

Executive summary

- 2 This report outlines the work of the **County Durham Partnership** and is framed under the **County Durham Vision 2035** three strategic ambitions (supported by the objectives to help us achieve these ambitions):

- (a) More and Better jobs
- (b) People live long and independent lives
- (c) Connected communities

This is further illustrated by wider partnership work and local examples from our AAPs.

- 3 Our partnership boards continue to deal effectively with a wide range of strategic issues affecting the county and our **Area Action Partnerships** are an important way of working with our local communities. AAPs address issues identified in their communities and show the significant

progress made at a local level is improving outcomes for our local people.

- 4 This report covers the period October 2024 to February 2025 and areas of work to highlight include the following.

Vision 2035 Ambition: More and better jobs

- 5 An update of the Economic Review has been undertaken to provide a more detailed assessment of economic changes across a number of measures in recent years. This shows that the economy has largely recovered from Covid-19, and in some parts of the economy, such as employment levels and productivity, pre-Covid levels of performance have been exceeded. Between 2020 and 2022 the county's economy grew by more than 16% to £10.7 billion and around 8,000 more residents are in employment now than before the Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) was adopted, in 2022.
- 6 A special meeting of the **Economic Partnership** was convened in November 2024, hosted at Raby castle, to discuss the challenges faced by the rural community in relation to economic growth.
- 7 Our DurhamEnable service was ranked as "excellent" in its most recent Supported Employment Quality Framework assessment.

Vision 2035 Ambition: People live long and independent lives

- 8 The council's, Free school Meal Auto Enrolment Pilot, has led to the auto-enrolment of 2,469 school children onto free school meals which has unlocked an additional estimated £3.5million in funding for schools, further supporting educational outcomes.
- 9 A Making Suicide Everybody's Business Conference, supported by the **Health and Wellbeing Board** took place on 18 February 2025 for professionals across the system to raise awareness of the issue of suicide across County Durham. This conference brought people together to look at action we are already taking and explore what more we can all do to prevent future suicides in County Durham.
- 10 In September 2024, the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership** agreed the new Environment and Climate Change Partnership Plan 2025-28. The plan builds on the previous plan by introducing priorities identified following the Emergency Summit 2024.
- 11 The annual County Durham Environment Awards 2024 ceremony, organised by the Environment and Climate Change Partnership, took place on 13 February 2025, at Hardwick Hall Hotel. The awards recognise the great work and commitment communities and

organisations have towards caring for the natural and built environment through sustainable innovation, design, and volunteering across the county.

Vision 2035 Ambition: Connected Communities

- 12 On 6 February 2025 the **County Durham Partnership** hosted its annual event, which this year focused **on Empowering Communities: How can the County Durham Partnership better support community action in 2025 and beyond.** Approximately 120 people from the wider County Durham Partnership, Board members, VCS organisations, statutory services, and across communities came together to share experiences and learn lessons for how we can all work together to better support community action.
- 13 Our current 14 Area Action Partnerships will be replaced by 12 Local Networks from April 2025. The aim of the new model is to enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become involved in improving their area.
- 14 75 Welcome Spaces were supported from October 2024 to January 2025, with approximately £190,000 of funding allocated.
- 15 An Energy Efficiency Grant fund (CBEEG) of £130,000 was provided by DCC to provide support to those responsible for the management of community buildings to reduce their carbon footprint and to help make their buildings more energy efficient. A range of community building energy efficiency measures have been utilised across the county: including improving insulation, solar panel installation, lighting and heating improvements, window and door replacements and the use of air source heat pumps.
- 16 The principle of recognising care experience as a local protected characteristic across County Durham was adopted by Full Council at their meeting in January, championed by the **Corporate Parenting Panel.**
- 17 The **Safe Durham Partnership** has been shortlisted for the Exemplary Partnership Award at the National Anti-Social Behaviour Awards for the work relating to bringing the Community Safety Partnerships in Durham and Darlington together to agree one joint approach to tackling Anti-Social Behaviour.

Recommendation

- 18 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this update.

Background

- 19 The **County Durham Partnership** including the board and forum (which bring together the board and local communities), five partnerships (**Health and Wellbeing Board, Safe Durham Partnership, Economic Partnership, Environment and Climate Change Partnership** and **County Durham Together Partnership**), **Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership** and the **Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership, Better Together VCS Forum** and all **Area Action Partnerships** lead on key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county.

County Durham Partnership

- 20 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 to achieve our vision that “**County Durham is a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive**”.
- 21 The **County Durham Partnership** met in September 2024 where it received the new streamlined Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024-29 and discussed the Safe Durham Partnership Board’s role in delivering the strategy, including responding to emerging national and local issues, supporting communities to deal with changes, identifying links between areas of work and tackling shared challenges.
- 22 The Board agreed, in light of last year’s national incidents of community disruption caused by misinformation spread by social media, partnership work to explore the potential risks and impacts of misinformation in respect of community cohesion is key.
- 23 In November 2024, the Board discussed the future of partnership working and the potential for a County Durham Partnership Event exploring a whole systems approach to supporting County Durham to thrive, including the need for a partnership approach to supporting community action. The meeting also brought together outcomes from recent formal inspections of adult social services, policing and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in the County.
- 24 In January 2025, the **County Durham Partnership** discussed the **County Durham Vision** and ensuring it is fit for purpose and reflects the current context both regionally and nationally as well as in County Durham. It was agreed that we are in a very changed environment compared to 2019 when the County Durham Vision was developed, and the plan should reflect the current position. The County Durham

Partnership agreed to a review of the Vision. The Partnership also received an overview of developments in advance of the AAP transition to Local Networks in April 2025.

County Durham Partnership Event

- 25 On 6 February 2025 the County Durham Partnership hosted its annual event, which this year focused on **Empowering Communities: How can the County Durham Partnership better support community action in 2025 and beyond**. Approximately 120 people from the wider County Durham Partnership, Board members, VCS organisations, statutory services, and across communities came together to share experiences and learn lessons for how we can all work together to better support community action.
- 26 Kate Burrows, Executive Director, Durham Community Action, outlined how our approach to transformation is being developed through **County Durham Together**. It was acknowledged that input from partners at the event (which includes the VCS and community) would be invaluable in refining the approach and how we further embed it within partnership working going forward.
- 27 Leaders of some successful community projects talked about the ways in which partner organisations supported their success and highlighted challenges that they had encountered; organisations talked about some new ways they are working to empower communities; and everyone came together to understand the challenges and agree some actions the partnership can take forward to support County Durham to thrive.
- 28 Our keynote speaker was Katie Kelly, Chair of New Local, an independent think tank and network, with a mission to transform public services and unlock community power. Katie brought her valuable experience of working with organisations to unlock whole system change and challenged leaders to make it the norm.
- 29 Delegates attended workshops themed around partnership working and the role of public sector and communities into the future, which focused on the role of anchor institutions, community research, funding models and strategic and community assets.

Vision 2035 Ambition: More and better jobs

- 30 A number of initiatives, outlined below, form a key part of the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES), the adopted strategy of the **Economic Partnership**.

Objective 1.2: We will have a strong, competitive economy and County Durham will be the premier place in the North East to do business

- 31 A range of new activities have been taken forward including a new Enterprise Framework, Business Growth programme, and new innovation initiatives. Important programmes such as DurhamWorks have been continued and a range of other employability programmes have been introduced, which have been vital to address the county's long standing worklessness challenges as well as economic recovery from Covid-19. The development of the IES and Delivery Plan have also enabled partners to discuss and work together on a wide range of activities in other parts of the economy including our towns and visitor attractions.
- 32 An update of the Economic Review has been undertaken to provide a more detailed assessment of economic changes across a number of measures in recent years. This shows that the economy has largely recovered from Covid-19, and in some parts of the economy, such as employment levels and productivity, pre-Covid levels of performance have been exceeded. Between 2020 and 2022 the county's economy grew by more than 16% to £10.7 billion and around 8,000 more residents are in employment now than before the Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) was adopted, in 2022.
- 33 The proportion of residents working in the highest skilled occupations has grown from 39% in 2021 to 47% in March 2024, which is equivalent to 22,700 more residents in these occupations. This suggests 20% growth in County Durham compared to 6% in England, meaning County Durham has closed the gap with the national rate.
- 34 A key improvement has been the significant growth of the overall Gross Value Added (GVA) for the county, which indicates productivity. After several years of slow growth, GVA grew from £9.2 billion in 2020 to £9.8 billion in 2021, and £10.7 billion in 2022 (the latest data). Although part of this growth relates to the high levels of inflation over the last few years, it also indicates the strengthening of the county's economy.
- 35 To support rural growth a focused rural economy session has taken place with the **Economic Partnership**.
- 36 A special meeting of the **Economic Partnership** was convened in November 2024, hosted at Raby castle, to discuss the challenges faced by the rural community in relation to economic growth. The board discussed barriers to growth including rural connectivity, affordable housing, skills, and the cost of doing business in the rural areas of the county. Alongside these challenges, there were a number of

opportunities including community engagement, tourism, health and wellbeing and environmental. A rural lens will be applied to all aspects of the **Inclusive Economic Strategy** and the delivery plan moving forward.

37 Our **Teesdale Action Partnership** and **Weardale AAP** have funded Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services (UTASS) to help with the challenges faced by rural communities.

38 To support the challenges with transport across rural areas, with many people not having their own forms of transport and the public transport offer being limited across the Upper Dales area. Funding from **Teesdale Action Partnership** and Durham County Council Local Transport Plan has been used to purchase a new fully accessible minibus to help a rural charity with their accessible transport needs.

39 Funding for a new fully accessible minibus will allow UTASS to continue to provide a valuable service for residents and community groups. Between June 2022 and July 2023, the UTASS minibuses made 174 journeys, carrying 380 adults and 271 children. 132 of the journeys were made by external community groups and organisations, with the remainder being linked to UTASS community activity. Overall, within the 12-month period 7,365 miles have been travelled.



Receiving the keys the new UTASS accessible minibus

40 As a training provider, who have specific understanding and specialist skills to deliver training bespoke to the rural communities of Weardale and Teesdale, **Weardale AAP** has provided funding to UTASS for Rural Skills Training

41 By listening to the needs of the farmers, and those working in the rural communities, a training offer was formulated. The overarching aim is to improve economic wellbeing and upskill the workforce. This includes chainsaw handling, food hygiene, first aid, artificial insemination, drystone walling and off-road quad bike riding.

42 Off-road quad bike riding, in some cases is the only means of transport on the fells. Weardale Ski Club accessed training for volunteers to ride in adverse weather conditions. The training offered was bespoke and unique and will enhance skill sets for future job opportunities.

Objective 1.3: We will broaden the experience for residents and visitors to the county

- 43 Durham County Council holds cabinet leadership for the Culture, Creative Tourism and Sport portfolio for the North East Combined Authority (NECA). Three key projects are underway which will significantly enhance visitor experience in County Durham and the wider region in the next 2 years:
- (a) Exploring the potential for the North East to become the first UK Region of Sport:
 - (b) Preparing the first Regional Events Strategy; and
 - (c) Publishing a ten-year Tourism Strategy for the region.
- 44 The council, Durham University, Visit County Durham, and Durham Sport and Culture stakeholders are participating in all three projects.

Objective 1.4: Young people will have access to good quality education, training and employment

- 45 The importance of raising aspirations in young people so they can excel in business and their careers is highlighted in our IES. Future Business Magnates will see students from 13 schools compete to create a winning business idea. This year's theme is 'Reimagining the High Street' and tasks pupils with creating a business that will breathe new life into the high street and help transform their local community.
- 46 The year-long competition, will see students supported by a range of County Durham businesses, including Waterstons, Robertson Homes, Stiller and Co-op Distribution among others, and is the only one of its kind in the region. Students will be able to celebrate their success at a ceremony held at the end of the academic year when the winners will also be crowned.

Objective 1.5: We will focus our efforts on helping all people into rewarding work

- 47 Our DurhamEnable service was ranked as "excellent" in its most recent Supported Employment Quality Framework assessment. This accreditation is an acknowledgement of the commitment our officers give to support disabled people to gain the skills and confidence to succeed in long term employment, and beyond.



DurhamEnable helping people find employment with local businesses.

- 48 The service received this accreditation in both its main UK Shared Prosperity Fund backed service and its Local Supported Employment Programme - making it one of the only providers in the UK to have an "excellent" rating for both areas.
- 49 **Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP** awarded funding to Bridge Creative for The E & O Project. The project aims to empower adults with learning disabilities and autistic adults by supporting them in setting up their own businesses and moving into self-employment. This will be done through enterprise workshops, one on one mentoring, and access to resources needed to start and sustain their own enterprises. The project aims to enable participants to use their unique skills and experiences to create viable businesses, whilst boosting their independence and financial stability.
- 50 Workshops will be adapted to meet the learning needs of people on the project and experienced business mentors will provide personalised guidance to help participants develop business plans, navigate challenges, and build their confidence. The project will offer each participant £400 for essential start-up costs, for example, buying a piece of equipment or paying for training they need to start their enterprise.

Objective 1.6: Fewer people will be affected by poverty and deprivation in the county

- 51 The **Poverty Action Steering Group's** work has continued to concentrate on protecting our most vulnerable communities with initiatives focused on mitigating the impact of food and fuel poverty, ensuring access to welfare advice and guidance services, and promoting financial inclusion.

- 52 Initiatives to improve access to data and intelligence, determine measures to better understand our residents and their financial issues, and to assess the impact of poverty alleviation work has continued.
- 53 Data has been utilised to pinpoint 30,000 properties in areas of the county where residents are statistically more likely to underclaim benefits. A leaflet with Pension Credit information has been delivered directly to those households, reinforcing the information, and encouraging further engagement.
- 54 Early campaign insights are indicating positive outcomes, 40% of targeted individuals have completed an application, 10% indicated they would seek assistance from family members or partnering organisations and 21% are now successfully in receipt of Pension Credit. A full evaluation of the campaign's impact will be conducted in early 2025 to assess longer term outcomes and inform future initiatives.
- 55 As noted in our previous County Durham Partnership update report, two Financial Inclusion Support Officers (FISO's) are now in post working with 12 secondary schools across County Durham. 92 referrals have been received from July – September 2024, suggesting that more people are seeking assistance with school uniforms, free school meals, welfare benefit checks, benefit applications and fuel poverty advice, highlighting a heightened demand for these essential services. A 'quick guide to benefits and support' is currently being produced by the FISO's to share across school communities.
- 56 To support the work of the Poverty Action Steering group, The County Durham Poverty Truth Commission (a subgroup of the **County Durham Together Partnership**), will provide a framework for engagement, bringing together people experiencing poverty with decision-makers and organisational leaders to share stories and identify change that can make a difference. It provides a strong base for identifying themes requiring transformation and for co-production of sustainable models for the future to tackle poverty in County Durham. A launch event took place on 11 March 2025.
- 57 Over the summer holidays 136 projects ran as part of the **Fun and Food programme**, with 4,986 children in total taking part in activities through the DfE funded and UK Shared Prosperity Fund/Household Support Fund funded provision. A total of 36,684 places were booked at a variety of clubs.
- 58 Additional summer holiday funding was also secured from The Bread-and-Butter Thing, providing 5 Family Trips (389 places) to families that were being supported by the Family Hubs.

- 59 The Fun and Food programme continues to be promoted on the website www.durham.gov.uk/funandfood and social media channels [\(20+\) Fun and Food County Durham | Facebook](#). The programme has worked closely with the Area Action Partnerships, members of the Voluntary and Community Sector and other partners, to promote the fantastic free range of activities and food available to support families during what can often be challenging times.

Vision 2035 Ambition: People live long and independent lives

Objective 2.1: Children and young people will enjoy the best possible start in life, good health and emotional wellbeing

- 60 The council's, Free school Meal Auto Enrolment Pilot, has led to the auto-enrolment of 2,469 school children onto free school meals which has unlocked an additional estimated £3.5million in funding for schools, further supporting educational outcomes. This sees a total financial benefit of £1.1 million for families across the county.
- 61 A **County Durham Breakfast Seminar** was held in December where representatives from Durham Youth Council attended to speak to delegates about the impact on their lives of social media, both positive and negative. Delegates discussed how social media impacts on our wider communities and how faith leaders should consider using social media as a tool to promote empathy and collective wellbeing. The topic was very well received by those attending and a brief on the seminar has been posted on the County Durham Partnership website [County Durham Breakfast Seminars](#).

Objective 2.3: We will create a physical environment that will contribute to good health

- 62 Obesity/overweight is a chronic condition and a major risk factor in many health conditions, and levels continue to rise across the County which poses a significant challenge in relation to children, young people and adults. Obesity/overweight is at the highest levels in areas where there is most deprivation. Enabling Healthy weight for all is one of the priorities in the [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy \(JLHWS\) 2023-28](#).
- 63 At its meeting in September, the **Health and Wellbeing Board** agreed the refreshed County Durham Healthy Weight Action Plan, which is a systemwide approach to guide action with communities and workplaces to support and empower people to make healthier choices. The plan has the following five ambition action areas:
- (a) Healthy at place

- (b) Healthy families
- (c) Healthy sustainable food for all
- (d) Healthy workforce
- (e) Healthy weight: Patient care

- 64 Durham County Council has formally committed to becoming a signatory to the Healthy Weight Declaration and will host an event to celebrate this significant step. The declaration aims to secure leadership commitment to promoting healthy weight across all policy areas, improving the health and wellbeing of the local population. The Healthy Weight Declaration incorporates 16 commitments, aligning closely with the County Durham Healthy Weight Plan. A celebratory event will include a formal signing and will take place at County Hall on 18 March.
- 65 **Derwent Valley AAP** is supporting the delivery of a Beacon of Light project in partnership with Consett Steelers Netball Club. This project provides a unique opportunity to improve para-sport provision for children and young people in the area, and in turn enhance their health and wellbeing.
- 66 The project will deliver 20 inclusive netball sessions at various locations including Consett leisure centre, local schools and community buildings. Local disabled children and young people will have opportunities to access netball sessions and events via these outreach opportunities and transport will also be provided to help remove barriers to participation.
- 67 **East Durham Rural Corridor AAP** funded Nuvo Wellbeing (a social enterprise encouraging increase fitness levels and healthy lifestyle choices) to engage young people aged 5 – 16 from underprivileged areas, to benefit from weekly dance coaching sessions at Trimdon Grange Community Centre. Led by industry experts, the sessions covered street dance and musical theatre, as well as confidence building and active listening exercises.
- 68 The coaching included presentations by team members who have overcome similar challenges and attended Nuvo's sessions in their youth. These role models, now with successful careers, inspired participants to pursue dance and wellbeing career opportunities in their community. The participants have performed at various events, including a community dance show, an AAP Board meeting, and an

Armed Forces Day, demonstrating the impact participation in dance has had on confidence and community involvement.

- 69 In September 2024, the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership** agreed the new Environment and Climate Change Partnership Plan 2025-28. The plan builds on the previous plan by introducing priorities identified following the Emergency Summit 2024. The partnership has six strategic priorities:
- (a) Develop and action the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for County Durham
 - (b) Action the partnership elements of the Countywide Climate Emergency Response Plan for County Durham
 - (c) Coordinate engagement across communities to improve understanding of the environmental and climate change challenges facing County Durham
 - (d) Increase finance available to invest in solutions that tackle the climate and ecological emergencies and overcome the negative impacts on people and communities
 - (e) Influence the North East Combined Authority to ensure the environmental and climate change issues of County Durham are a significant part of their agenda
 - (f) Increase cross thematic partnership collaboration with the Economic Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 70 This will set the strategic direction of the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership** for the coming years, with the aim of achieving the partnership vision for 'a better County Durham: sustainable communities, resilient to climate change, richer in nature'. The aim is to INFORM, INFLUENCE and AMPLIFY on environmental and climate change issues in County Durham.
- 71 The annual **County Durham Environment Awards 2024** ceremony, organised by the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership**, took place on 13 February 2025, at Hardwick Hall Hotel. The awards recognise the great work and commitment communities and organisations have towards caring for the natural and built environment through sustainable innovation, design, and volunteering across the county. The Awards bring people together to build greater community engagement and encourage positive behaviours towards our precious environment. 45 nominations were received this year, with a panel of

expert judges and young people identifying the category winners, who were presented with their awards on the evening.

72 Winning entries for each category were:

- (a) **Responding to Climate Change** – there were two winners: the MGL Group for the Road Surfacing and Cold Milling Framework and The Lanchester group
- (b) **Green Business** – Marmax Recycled Products
- (c) **Nature in Places and Spaces** – Durham University Enhancing Biodiversity for All project
- (d) **Schools and Colleges** – OASES Nature for Wellbeing project
- (e) **Volunteer Group of the Year** – there were two winners: Teesdale Special Floral Trust and Mammal Web
- (f) **Volunteer of the Year Over 18** – there were two winners: Peter Stout from Patch to Plate and Wendy Garland from Building Self Belief CIO
- (g) **Volunteer of the Year Under 18** – Kathryn McKinney
- (h) **Sustainable Built Environment** – Durham University for James Barber House
- (i) **Environmental Community Action** – Cotherstone Old Chapel project
- (j) **Active Outdoors** – Ushaw Historic House Community Woodland Planting

73 Each year the judges consider all the entries for an Outstanding Award, which is given at the discretion of the judging panel. The outstanding award recognises those schemes which go beyond exemplary status in their own category. They display elements which cut across a number of categories and not only fulfil the criteria of the County Durham Environment Awards but



Lanchester Group receiving their Outstanding Award at the Environment Awards evening

set an example of sustainable and environmentally friendly activity on a regional or national basis. This year the judges decided that one entry achieved this, and Outstanding Award was awarded to The Lanchester Group.

- 74 The Lanchester Group comprises eight businesses under common, private ownership of the Cleary family. It is headquartered in Annfield Plain which is the home to Lanchester Wines, Greencroft Bottling, Lanchester Energy and Lanchester Properties. They apply a multi-faceted approach to minimising their impact on the environment, combining renewable energy and heat generation, maximising energy efficiency and introducing market-leading sustainable products.
- 75 Environmental sustainability is core to the Lanchester Group's long term business strategy, promoting the ethos that it is every businesses duty of care to minimise its impact on the environment. They have invested over £13million in renewable heat and energy generation at their sites across the North East and today their business is powered almost completely by renewable wind and solar energy. An example of their innovative work is the installation of geothermal heat pumps in their warehouses, the first business in the UK to do so. They have two open loop water source heat pumps with combined capacity of 4 Megawatts, which utilise water in disused mine workings below their properties to generate renewable heat. The heat pumps have reduced their space heating by 80% - which is equivalent carbon footprint from 3,600 tonnes to 750 tonnes over several heating seasons.

- 76 The **Environment and Climate Change Partnership** has supported the development of the third Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP3), which was launched at a citizen's forum in Durham Town Hall on 17 October 2024, with over 100 attendees. The session included activities such as a panel discussion from selected officers to answer questions from the public, and workshops dedicated to the five different themes: heat and energy, natural environment, food and waste, transport and communications and engagement.



Climate Emergency Response Plan3 launch at Durham Town Hall

77 Attendees also had the chance to engage directly with officers and share their views on opportunities, challenges and how they can help fight the climate emergency and reach net zero goals. Challenges that the public shared included connecting with the students of County Durham and promoting plant-based diets meaningfully. They also shared potential opportunities including partnering with universities, prioritising climate in policies, and fostering biodiversity-friendly spaces. They acknowledged that opportunities could also lie in local, eco-friendly markets, climate related hubs, and collaborating with community champions, parish councils, and other community groups to drive practical solutions.

Objective 2.5: We will tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities

78 Mental health, wellbeing and resilience is one of the four priority areas for the **Health and Wellbeing Board** and was the focus of the January Health and Wellbeing Board meeting. A facilitated discussion helped to understand the challenges across the system and identify any gaps. The next steps include reviewing the ambitions for mental health, what it will take us to reach these ambitions and reviewing systemwide governance structures around mental health.

79 As part of World Mental Health Day, the Big Arts Project, a community scheme, invited organisations and artists to host a series of workshops and activities across the county. This initiative used Culture and Arts to promote good mental health, wellbeing and resilience. Funding was provided to each AAP who delivered a range of projects.

80 **Great Aycliffe and Middridge Partnership (GAMP)** targeted participants to those on waiting lists for secondary mental health care and those who have had regular contact with Community Mental Health Teams.

81 The project provided ceramic and pottery wellbeing group sessions by a trained therapeutic practitioner. Separate sessions took place for both adults and children and were well attended. Adults worked on paper collage pictures, printing using the drypoint etching technique, bookbinding and using watercolours. Whereas the children's group worked on an exhibition piece creating collage panels with depictions of what make them happy, self-portraits and words about how we should be with each other.

82 Feedback from the Groups includes "Coming to a group like this adds a different dynamic to my day and helps me to relax" and "I'm a single parent and coming along to a group like this can sometimes be the only connection I have with adults. It gives me chance to breathe".

- 83 A Making Suicide Everybody's Business Conference, supported by the **Health and Wellbeing Board** took place on 18 February 2025 for professionals across the system to raise awareness of the issue of suicide across County Durham. This conference brought people together to look at action we are already taking and explore what more we can all do to prevent future suicides in County Durham.
- 84 The conference included presentations from those working in the field of suicide prevention, and those with lived experience, including those who have experienced suicide bereavement, mental health challenges, and thoughts of suicide. The experience from emergency responders who have been affected by suspected suicide was also shared. Workshops provided a chance to discuss current and future ideas and action and exhibition stalls were available throughout the day.
- 85 A number of AAPs have supported projects relating to suicide prevention. **East Durham AAP** has funded Seaham Neighbourhood Police Team working in Partnership with the Papyrus Charity and their ASIST programme to provide Suicide Intervention Training.
- 86 The project was designed to improve knowledge and understanding of causes of suicide and assist vulnerable people within East Durham by being able to identify and deal with risk and in turn signpost vulnerable people to the correct agency/professionals. The two-day course helped participants recognise what a person at risk may need from others to keep safe and get help.
- 87 The course was designed to raise awareness for the participants to reduce the immediate risk of suicide. The course trained 30 various professionals and members of the East Durham community and enabled attendees to be able to:
- (a) identify people who have thoughts of Suicide
 - (b) obtain an understanding of the reasons for thoughts of suicide and reasons for living
 - (c) Recognise invitations for help
 - (d) Reach out and offer support
 - (e) Apply suicide intervention model
 - (f) Link people with Community resources
 - (g) Review risk and develop a plan to increase safety from suicidal behaviour and follow up and access further help as needed.

88 By giving people, the tools and knowledge to be able to recognise and address risk and to signpost to appropriate services, allows people to receive long term intervention and support in a timely manner.

89 **Chester-le-Street AAP** have provided funding to the If U Care Share Foundation. The project offers one to one practical, emotional and social support for individuals at risk of suicide. The project aims to provide fair and impartial access to timely, appropriate and effective services specifically tailored to meet the needs of communities. Bespoke, one-to-one support is available, open to all and not limited in terms of the number of sessions a person is able to access.

90 **3 Towns Partnership** allocated funding to St Catherine's Church Dementia Support Café to enable them to continue to provide support to those living with dementia and their carers and to those living alone and isolated by providing a morning of friendship, entertainment, and refreshments.



Christmas party at the dementia support cafe

91 The Cafe is held once a month on a Saturday morning, ran completely by volunteers who organise entertainers, transport, refreshments, heating and lighting and special events, for example, a Christmas Party and occasional outings.

92 The Dementia Support Cafe has run successfully for seven years and has lifted the profile for those living with dementia but has also opened the door for the lonely and isolated to come along and enjoy meeting others in the same situation. The Dementia Support Cafe has seen increased membership with regular attendance.

93 The **4 Together Partnership** has supported Endeavour Woodcraft, Ferryhill to deliver a Craft Café fortnightly at their premises. The project is currently running at full capacity with 29 regular attendees and an opportunity for others to join when spaces become available.

94 Attendees have been identified, with a specific focus upon mental health, the socially isolated and elderly individuals. By bringing targeted audiences together, each session provides an opportunity to socialise, gain friendly support and guidance and to take part in different crafts.

95 The team delivering the project have developed strong working relationships with participants and local artists and over the past six months the group have undertaken such crafts as woodworking, floristry

skills, decoupage, and terrazzo crafting, learning new skills and making long lasting connections, improving their overall mental health and wellbeing.

- 96 **Mid Durham AAP** have supported the 'SPA' group who are a diverse group of older people and those with physical and mental challenges, who meet together at St Andrews Methodist church hall in Brandon every Tuesday to enjoy physical and craft activities together. Once a month they also meet around the dinner table to converse and make new friends.

- 97 Volunteers are trained and tasks include helping everyone who comes along, planning the trips, booking the regular transport, risk assessing the visits, undertaking food hygiene and first aid courses, ensuring there is a high standard of helpers to maintain the clubs' activities. Some activities and themes this year included:



SPA group members with the Christmas wreaths they created at one of the sessions.

- (a) Introducing some Makaton sessions/learning, where signs are used, with speech, in spoken word order. Using signs can help people who have no speech or whose speech is unclear and using printed or drawn symbols can help people who have limited speech and those who cannot sign or prefer not to sign.
 - (b) A session on waste recycling supervised by Durham County Council. As a result of this session, members have become involved along with the local community in recycling paper, card, plastic, vapes, batteries and small electrical and electronic items. Facilities are available on the premises for people to leave materials for recycling.
 - (c) A speaker from Age UK, spoke on Digital Awareness and scams and provided a demonstration/workshop on nutrition and cooking nutritious food, giving transferrable knowledge and skills to use in the home to benefit physical health.
- 98 Teesdale farmer Becky Land signed up to become a **County Durham Together Community Champion** and as a trusted voice in their neighbourhood, she championed the voices of people living in rural and farming communities.

- 99 As part of her role, Becky carried out a survey in Teesdale, speaking to farmers about what issues they felt affected their physical and mental health, with feedback including worries about the future of farming.
- 100 Becky's feedback was also added to Healthwatch County Durham's Farming Outreach Initiative work, which resulted in a walk-in clinic being organised at Pinfold Medical Practice in Butterknowle, offering health checks specifically for farmers. Following the success of the first clinic, a second clinic is being organised which will include mental health checks for farmers.
- 101 Becky's involvement in this work also led to her receiving training in Understanding Mental Health and she is now a Lived Experience Lead with Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services.
- 102 The **County Durham Armed Forces Forum** was held in October. The Forum heard two health related presentations, the first from the Veterans Social Prescribing Link worker on how his role has a significant impact on the lives of the veterans and their families that he supports. The second presentation was from an NHS Mental Health practitioner from Op. Courage, which is an NHS service designed to support veterans who are finding life difficult after leaving the military. The Forum was very well attended with over 30 partners and charities present.

Objective 2.6: Better integration of health and social care services

- 103 The Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Leadership Group (a subgroup of the **County Durham Together Partnership**) is mapping spend into the VCS alongside Durham Community Action, to better understand provision, gaps and impact. The group aims to recommend a more standardised process across partner organisations for grant funding of VCSE partners and aims to develop guidance for commissioners to learn and build on grant pathways.
- 104 The **Better Together Forum** held their second bi-annual Policy Forum in October 2024. The event was well attended with over 60 delegates. The focus of the forum was to explore how procurement, commissioning and delivery is working through the Durham Pound and the ways and means in which the VCSE can demonstrate their contribution, value and impacts.

Vision 2035 Ambition: Connected communities

Objective 3.1: All children and young people will have a safe childhood

- 105 The principle of recognising care experience as a protected characteristic across County Durham was adopted by Full Council at their meeting in January, championed by the **Corporate Parenting Panel**.
- 106 Josh McAllister was appointed by Government to undertake an independent review of Children's Social Care between July 2021 and May 2022. In his report, published in May 2022, he advocated for a legislative change to the Equality Act 2010 to include care experience as a protected characteristic. Although this legislative change has not been progressed by government, a number of local authorities across England have adopted care experience as a protected characteristic.
- 107 In Durham, we are already committed to supporting our young people, and a working group has been established to consider what adopting care experience as a protected characteristic means in practice across all our services and from our elected members.
- 108 A second Care Leavers hub has opened at Stanley Leisure Centre to offer support to care leavers across County Durham. Advisors will be on hand to offer emotional support, help with education, training, employment and health needs as well as crisis support and help with finances. In addition to advice, the hub will offer free snacks, food parcels and items of clothing such as winter coats. It also features a pool table and table tennis as well as planned sessions like crafts and graffiti arts, so young people can learn new skills and meet people.

Objective 3.4: Our Towns and Villages will be vibrant, well used, clean, attractive and safe

- 109 The Towns and Villages programme has supported a wide range of regeneration projects since its launch in 2018, as well as helping hundreds of new and existing businesses to thrive. This includes bringing empty buildings back into use and providing training to new retail businesses, supporting events and improving walking and cycling routes - the programme responds to the challenges faced by many towns and villages and delivers improvements for the benefit of all those who live, work, study and visit there.
- 110 To date, £13.5 million has been invested; a further £15.8 million has been committed to new projects and grant schemes; and £2.7 million remains to be allocated. More than £81 million of private sector

investment and other match funding has also been secured for place-based regeneration.

- 111 Key Towns and Villages achievements between 1 April 2018 and 31 September 2024 include:
- (a) 132 vacant buildings brought back into use
 - (b) 261 businesses supported, including 84 new businesses
 - (c) Grants totalling £1.75 million awarded
 - (d) 504 full time equivalent jobs created
 - (e) 365.5 full time equivalent jobs safeguarded
- 112 The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has been utilised around community hubs work. The Digital Community Hubs programme involves Digital Durham and Technical Services colleagues in Digital Services equipping up to 26 community organisations located mainly in the 16 'left behind' neighbourhoods and rural communities, with devices, connectivity and the necessary skills to help digitally excluded residents get online. Once the hub is set up, Digital Durham will work with each organisation to create a bespoke digital programme.
- 113 The importance of community buildings and facilities is invaluable, as without these there would be no community groups, organisations and sports clubs within our communities.
- 114 An Energy Efficiency Grant fund (CBEEG) of £130,000 was provided by DCC, administered by Durham Community Action (DCA), to provide support to those responsible for the management of community buildings to reduce their carbon footprint and to help make their buildings more energy efficient. The project complemented the Shared Prosperity Fund funded Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP), and energy efficiency audits were provided where community buildings were run by social enterprises. In 2024, DCA received a further grant of £10,757 through DCC to organise energy audits for community buildings to allow the focus of the BEEP programme to remain focussed on the Durham Business Growth Project, but to allow the CBEEG programme to continue.
- 115 Over a two-year period, there have been 27 grants of up to £5,000, which have been distributed for buildings who have received an audit, which have funded small scale improvements such as energy efficiency lighting installations and insulation improvements. A total of 49 energy audits have been carried out on community buildings and a further 10 audits are likely to be carried out in the next month through UKSPF

funding. It is expected that the CBEEG grant pot will be exhausted by the end of May 2025.

- 116 Building on the CBEEG project, community building energy efficiency measures have been undertaken in a range of community venues across the county, including insulation improvements, solar panels, lighting and heating improvements, window and door replacements and utilising air source heat pumps, which have used the energy audit as an evidence based tool for funding applications for Area and Neighbourhood Budget, Towns and Villages Funding and UKSPF, demonstrating the value of a joined-up approach between multiple teams, services and external partners.
- 117 **Durham AAP** has supported the Framwellgate Moor Youth and Community Centre to help them update their heating system. This is helping them to reduce their energy consumption and therefore their energy costs. Funding has also been made to Durham City Gymnastics Club to help them improve their disabled toilets to enable the building to be accessible to all, and St Oswald's Institute received a grant towards a building extension which will enable them to offer more to the local community.

Objective 3.6: Communities will come together to accept and support each other

- 118 Our current 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) will be replaced by 12 **Local Networks** from April 2025.
- 119 The aim of the new model is to enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become involved in improving their area. Local Networks will adopt a more strategic and outcomes-focussed approach, developing four-year local action plans to guide investment and identify more opportunities for partnership working.
- 120 Alongside this, the existing AAP Forum, made up of 15,000 people, will form a new countywide County Durham Community Network with increased opportunities to engage and help shape Local Network plans.
- 121 The new Local Networks and the County Durham Community Network will allow strengthened existing partnership working to help identify and respond to any immediate challenges facing our communities.
- 122 The development of four-year action plans for each Local Network will also help to build strong and resilient communities through a more strategic approach to their work, funding and outcomes. These plans will be informed by community views and a detailed understanding of the demographics of each network, putting residents at the heart of

each network and giving them more opportunities to improve their own area.

123 Firmly established as an annual highlight of the DCC BRASS Festival, the Little Brass Bashes feature top UK and International bands to present an evening of high-energy and high-quality entertainment at locations all over County Durham. These free to attend audience events bring local communities together to be entertained by our festival street bands.

124 **Spennymoor AAP** allocated funding to the Little Brass Bash event in the area which included performances by:

(a) Rajasthan Heritage Band

(b) She's Got Brass

(c) Oompah Brass

125 The event encouraged widespread participation in the arts which is beneficial to mental health and wellbeing and through bringing a high energy and engaging event, can help to unify community cohesion via the arts. The event was extremely successful and was attended by over 300 residents from the Spennymoor AAP area.

126 The council, in partnership with Point North (formerly County Durham Community Foundation) have supported a network of **Welcome Spaces** for the third year. Funding of £250,000 was secured from UKSPF and £100,000 from Public Health, as well as £17,500 from Point North, to support community venues across the county. Welcome Spaces can apply for a grant of up to £3,000 to enable them to extend their activities or supply additional sessions, as well as refreshments. DCC's Libraries and Family Hubs are the authorities' own Welcome Spaces with everyone made to feel comfortable and able to access these places without question or time limit.



PACT House in Stanley received funding from the Welcome Spaces fund.

- 127 75 Welcome Spaces were supported from October 2024 to January 2025, with approximately £190,000 of funding allocated.
- 128 The scale of the global humanitarian challenge means that the United Kingdom is facing significant demands for **humanitarian support** and local authorities are being asked to assist the Government response.
- 129 The council is proud of its commitment to assist some of the world's most vulnerable people, which started in May 2016 when the county welcomed its first refugee arrivals. Since then, the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) has been established, two schemes to assist Afghan arrivals have been introduced and the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme has enabled support to those fleeing the invasion of Ukraine. The national transfer scheme also assists unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) allocated to the care of local authority areas.
- 130 Resettlement and Ukraine programmes are Government funded, over a five-year period for UKRS and three years for Afghan schemes, with additional resettlement grants for health and education. This resource has been used to develop the council's support structure, helping to sustain the work of the humanitarian support team, enabling support to programmes without diversion of general funds.
- 131 Over this period, the county has welcomed more than 100 families (over 500 people) under resettlement and Afghan programmes and more than 700 Homes for Ukraine arrivals, helping vulnerable people to find a safe place to rebuild their lives.
- 132 The council's response is measured and proportionate to the county's share of the national population and considers current ability to support and accommodate people.
- 133 In January 2025 Cabinet agreed continued support for the UKRS and Afghan resettlement schemes to accommodate up to three phases each year, subject to continued Government funding arrangements.
- 134 The United Kingdom's asylum system continues to face significant pressure, with thousands of asylum seekers in contingency accommodation, including hotels, together with high numbers of new arrivals. As a result, in 2022 the Government mandated all local authority areas in England, Scotland and Wales to participate in a system of full dispersal asylum accommodation to enable a move to less expensive, more suitable accommodation.
- 135 Regional plans for the allocation of the asylum population to local authority areas were agreed for 2022. This included individuals and families moving out of contingency hotels and initial accommodation

into dispersed accommodation, as well as an estimation of likely asylum seeker arrivals across the ensuing period.

- 136 In July 2024, the Home Office rolled out plans for future allocations to local areas, using an indexing model which considers:
- (a) housing
 - (b) viability
 - (c) social
 - (d) population factors
- 137 The plan is a 12-month rolling programme which is reviewed each quarter.
- 138 North East local authorities supported a reduced allocation to the region in the 2024 plan; however, concerns remain about whether plans can realistically be achieved in other regions, many of which appear to have progressed little since the introduction of regional plans for full dispersal.
- 139 Following agreement by Cabinet, asylum accommodation funding has been used to establish a new arrivals pathway to link asylum arrivals to a voluntary/community sector partner, Communities Together Durham. Funding will also be used to develop the voluntary sector infrastructure and support services for the asylum population accommodated within the county.
- 140 The county has a specific challenge in comparison to other North East authorities, with the majority of further procurement focused on County Durham. As an area that did not accommodate asylum seekers prior to the introduction of full dispersal, there has been a significant increase in arrivals in a short timeframe.

141 The **Advice in County Durham Partnership (AiCD)** hosted a half day Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support in County Durham Networking event at the Workplace in Newton Aycliffe in October and welcomed 62 delegates.

142 This event was aimed at frontline practitioners to highlight the Countywide Support available for both Refugees and Asylum Seekers. There are more people presenting in organisations requiring support and it was essential for AiCD to highlight the local offer.

143 The main keynote speakers were from DCC Humanitarian Team, who gave an overview of what defines an Asylum Seeker and Refugee and insight into the current Refugee Support Programmes in County Durham as well as the national UK Asylum Seeker accommodation programme.

144 Mears gave an overview of the Asylum accommodation provided locally and how they continue to work closely with DCC and the VCS sector.

145 Communities Together Durham who are lead on the New Arrivals Pathway gave an overview of the current support that they offer which includes registering with a GP, navigating the local area – including transport options, support with bus fares, school uniform, toiletries, access to Wi-Fi, English classes and signposting to additional support where necessary. The offer is expanding regularly to meet the needs of those presenting.

146 At the end of the session there was a panel consisting of the guest speakers which allowed attendees to ask any questions. A FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) factsheet was produced and sent to all those who attended, this also provided clear referral routes and key contacts. Those who attended felt more confident in the support available, connections were made, and relationships developed.

147 The **Safe Durham Partnership** has been shortlisted for the Exemplary Partnership Award at the National Anti-Social Behaviour Awards. The nomination was largely for the work relating to bringing the Community



Staff at the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support in County Durham Networking event

Safety Partnerships in Durham and Darlington together to agree one joint approach to tackling Anti-Social Behaviour, the Anti-Social Behaviour Case Review and the Anti-Social Behaviour strategy [ASB Strategy 2022-2025](#) based on the eight key principles as follows:

- (a) Working in Partnership
- (b) Championing the Victims' Voice
- (c) Provide the Best Victim Support
- (d) Provide Victim Centric Community Trigger and Community Remedy Processes
- (e) Implement Preventative measures
- (f) Make full use of tools and powers
- (g) Maximise use of digital technologies
- (h) An inclusive Approach

- 148 The ceremony took place on 6 March 2025 where the winners were announced.
- 149 **Stanley AAP** have supported Stanley Area Youth Consortium to help them deliver their Re-activate project which will provide a direct access route for young people at risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour. This is delivered as two weekend open access sessions offering diversionary and positive activities. The sessions will include a mix of outreach and centre-based activities focusing on sexual health, positive mental health and wellbeing, promoting a healthy lifestyle with an aim on identifying the dangers of using drugs, smoking and alcohol, risky behaviour, and personal safety.
- 150 An element of the project will also focus on helping young people to understand how anti-social behaviour can affect a community. Young people will be given the opportunity to engage in volunteering via the Youth Consortiums 'Know Your Neighbourhood' project as well as being allowed to express their own views and made to feel part of their community and be good citizens. Sessions will be delivered with a degree of flexibility but will take place on Friday, Saturday and or Sunday depending on local intelligence and the needs of young people. Young people will be encouraged to manage their behaviour and work towards gaining a place on a weekend residential, taking part in challenging outdoor activities.

- 151 The Contest Board is a multi-agency partnership and a sub-group of the **Safe Durham Partnership** which plans and delivers on activities relating the CONTEST Strategy, the governments Counter Terrorism Strategy.
- 152 The Counter Terrorism Local Profile provides a summary of threat and risk - nationally, regionally and locally. This has highlighted that a disproportionate amount of young people with neurodivergent traits such as Autism and ADHD are susceptible to radicalisation.
- 153 In response, DCC and Darlington Borough Council submitted a joint bid and were the only North East Local Authority successful in obtaining funding. This has been utilised to carry out a focused piece of work to upskill education providers who work directly with young people from 10 to 17 years old who have neurodivergent traits and were showing the early signs of radicalisation.
- 154 The website was launched in October 2024 which provides resources both for schools and for parents and carers. This will provide guidance and advice as well as a password protected portal for those trained in delivery to access the training videos in order to upskill relevant staff.

Objective 3.7: We will deliver new high-quality housing which is accessible and meets the needs and aspirations of our residents

- 155 A Housing Board has been established to act as the strategic housing partnership within County Durham for the consideration of housing and homelessness related policy issues.
- 156 The Board will provide a strategic policy advice function in relation to strategic housing, homelessness, health, social care and neighbourhood issues to the **Economic Partnership** and related partnerships, a number of regional boards and various housing partnerships and professionals across the region.

Conclusion

- 157 Evidence is available throughout our work which illustrates how partnership working is having a positive impact and has benefited County Durham and is helping us to achieve the County Durham Vision. As we reflect on the County Durham Partnership annual event and look forward to refreshing the County Durham Vision, 2025 is a good opportunity to consider how we deliver for the world we live in now.

Background papers

- None.

Other useful documents

- None.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

Area and neighbourhood budgets are utilised and delivered through the 14 AAPs and ensure the Council (and AAPs) receive improved information on the outputs achieved through use of locality budgets.

Consultation

The County Durham Partnership framework is a key community engagement and consultation function of the Council and its partners. The recommendations in the report are based on extensive consultation with AAP partners.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The actions set out in this report aim to ensure equality and diversity issues are embedded within the thematic partnerships and the working practice of AAPs.

Climate Change

This is recognised throughout partnership activities.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to form a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to tackle crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment and to reduce re-offending. In County Durham, the CSP is the Safe Durham Partnership.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.