

# **ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE AGENDA**



**Thursday 26 June 2026**

**at 10.00 am**

**in Council Chamber,  
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Allen (C), Boddy, Cook, Hall, Little, Roy.(VCh) and 1 Vacancy.

PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE(S):

S Gaiety (Headland Parish Council)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**

**3. MINUTES**

- 3.1 To receive the Minutes and Decision Record in respect of the meeting held on 20 March 2025 *(previously published and circulated)*.

**4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

None.

**5. KEY DECISIONS**

None.

**CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE**

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.

The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

**6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

- 6.1 Adult Social Care Annual Quality Assurance Report – 2024/25 – *Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*
- 6.2 Annual Report of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024-25 – *Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*
- 6.3 Care Quality Commission Assessment of Adult Social Care Services - *Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*
- 6.4 Supported Internships - *Executive Director Adult and Community Based Services*

**7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

- 7.1 Digital Innovation in Adult Social Care – *Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*
- 7.2 Allotment Strategy – *Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services*

**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

**FOR INFORMATION**

Date of next meeting – Thursday 18 September 2025 at 5.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



# ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

26 June 2025



**Subject:** ADULT SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT – 2024/25

**Report of:** Executive Director of Adult & Community Based Services

**Decision Type:** Non-Key

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## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

### Hartlepool will be a place:

- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives (People).
- with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community (Organisation).

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To present the Annual Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Quality assurance within adult social care aims to ensure that services are safe, effective and centred around the needs of the people receiving support.
- 3.2 To be effective quality assurance needs to be an ongoing process focused on continuous improvement. Quality assurance activities include observations of practice, document reviews, performance audits and peer challenge as well as using feedback from people who use services about their experiences.
- 3.3 Quality assurance of adult social care is overseen by a Continuous Improvement Group and since 2022/23 a Quality Assurance Annual Report has been produced to capture the range of assurance activity undertaken and the outcomes of this work.

#### 4. ANNUAL REPORT

- 4.1 The Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report (attached as **Appendix 1**) provides an overview of quality assurance activity undertaken within adult social care during 2024/25. Areas of work covered in the report include: feedback from carers and people who use services; case audits; peer review; and feedback from the workforce.

#### 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	There are no risks associated with this report. A commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement helps to ensure that risks are identified and mitigated.
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no financial considerations associated with this report. Quality assurance activity is funded from existing resources.
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	Not applicable.
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no legal considerations associated with this report.
<b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>	No child and family poverty considerations identified.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no specific equality and diversity considerations identified within this report. The Continuous Improvement Plan for 2025/26 includes a range of actions that aim to improve equity of outcomes for seldom heard groups within the local community.
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no staff considerations associated with this report. Quality assurance activity is managed within existing staffing resources.
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None identified.
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None identified.

<b>CONSULTATION</b>	There is no consultation required in relation to this report. Staff are involved in quality assurance work via case file audits, Practice Month and the Health Check and receive feedback through staff briefings.
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## 6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is recommended that the Adult and Community Based Services Committee approve the Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report 2024/25 and note the work that has been undertaken to ensure quality of practice and to understand the views of people with lived experience and the workforce.

## 7. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 The Adult & Community Based Services Committee has responsibility for adult social care provision and should seek assurance about the quality of services being provided.

## 8. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 02/06/25
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 30/05/25
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date:



# **ADULT SOCIAL CARE**

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE** **REPORT**

**April 2024 – March 2025**

## 1. **INTRODUCTION**

This report summarises activity undertaken during 2024/25 to assure the quality of adult social care services and covers a range of quality assurance activities including:

- CQC Assurance
- Survey Feedback
- Safeguarding Adults Quality Assurance Framework
- Audit Activity
- Performance Benchmarking
- Continuous Professional Development
- Feedback from the Workforce
- Celebrating Success
- Review of Complaints and Compliments

Quality Assurance is overseen by the Continuous Improvement Group with actions agreed in response to any activity undertaken and progress monitored.

## 2. **CARE QUALITY COMMISSION ASSESSMENT**

In May 2024 the Council received notification that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) would be assessing the delivery of adult social care services. This is part of a national programme which will involve all Local Authorities being assessed over a two year period.

As part of the preparation for the assessment a Local Authority Information Return (LAIR) was submitted in June 2024 and case tracking information was provided to inform the on-site assessment in November 2024. A draft report was provided in January 2025 and, following a factual accuracy and quality assurance process, it was confirmed that the final report would be published on the CQC website in May 2025.

Adult social care services achieved a 'good' rating overall with many strengths identified:

- There was positive feedback from people about the services they received in Hartlepool. People told us they had good experiences of both Care Act assessment and carers assessments, from knowledgeable and caring staff. Outcomes for care and support focused on people's strengths, goals and wellbeing. Unpaid carers were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of accessing support, including time away from their caring role and spoke highly of services supporting them.
- Most people could access information and advice, and their feedback was positive.
- People had access to a range of approaches and organisations to prevent, reduce and delay their need for care and support. There was good feedback about reablement, intermediate care and timely access to equipment and adaptations which supported people to remain at home.
- Wellbeing was embedded in the local authority and partner organisations' approach.
- People involved in co-production told us they had opportunities to be involved in different projects with the local authority including a parent carer forum, supported internships and community events.

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- The care market in Hartlepool was small, however we heard people had choice and feedback on care and support settings commissioned by the local authority was positive.
- Relationships with external and internal partners were effective and included co-location, multi-agency working with arrangements to share information, discuss concerns and issues and plan resources. Most commissioned community and voluntary sector organisations had good relationships with staff and the local authority.
- The leadership at Hartlepool was visible and approachable. They were not isolated from the wider workforce or external partnerships. We heard how staff interacted and engaged well with people and partners. Adult social care demonstrated its vision: 'We all want to live in a place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us.'
- There was oversight of Care Act assessment and carer assessment waiting lists and these were well managed. Staff had a good understanding of how to manage risks. The local authority had reduced waiting lists and used real-time data to understand where the pressures were, and they were monitoring areas which required improvement.
- Governance and management arrangements were in place, and these provided visibility and assurance on key priorities. There was a line of sight on areas where there was a risk people might not achieve good outcomes.
- There were effective systems, processes and practices for safeguarding and a coordinated approach.
- Staff had the relevant support, supervision and training including trauma informed practice training following learning from a multi-agency safeguarding adult review.
- An Inequalities Working Group had been established by adult social care to support their workforce, and an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy was in place.
- The local authority was proud of its workforce with confident practitioners which reinforced an evidence-based approach. There were strategies for recruitment, retention and to support staff development. The local authority championed a 'grow your own' approach, looked for progression routes for new employees and feedback was sought from their teams to support continuous improvement.
- The local authority had a long-standing leadership team and there was an established workforce. Leaders worked regionally and sub-regionally, were part of practice forums and acted as reviewers for other local authorities.
- The development of community led solutions through the community hubs and integrated single point of access meant there was a focus on providing the right care in the right place and developing the partnerships to achieve this. The staff articulated how they used a strength-based approach, focused on having good conversations, worked in partnership with people on clear outcomes and were able to measure impact. This transformation work supported improvement for people's choice and embedding strengths-based approaches, such as direct payments, independent living, and technology-enabled care. This aligned well with adult social care's ambition to achieve better outcomes and better lives.

There were areas for improvement identified, mainly in relation to equity of outcomes:

- Organisations supporting people with sensory impairments felt that information and advice was not always available in a format which supported them.
- People said co-production would benefit from a refresh.



- Not all organisations reported having good relationships.
- Making better use of data to support strategic planning.
- Communication with some communities could be improved. Information and advice provided was not always accessible to those for whom it was being provided.
- The local authority did not have a consistent approach to equity and understanding the diversity in communities or clear plans in place to reach out to seldom-heard groups.
- The Adult Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan (April 2024) did not include clear actions and measurable outcomes.

In many of the areas identified for improvement, work was already underway and this was recognised by the CQC:

- The local authority had plans to improve communications, co-production and working in partnership with seldom heard communities.
- The local authority recognised more work was needed in strengthening the analysis of data to support strategic planning and was developing an intelligence hub to use data across the council to deepen understanding of communities and gaps.
- The local authority had clear plans to explore use of video and audio communications on the website to improve accessibility and was exploring the option of using QR codes for language translation.
- The local authority acknowledged the need to work with all other ethnic communities to understand how they can make sure they are engaging with them and have the skills to offer them the support that they needed.
- The local authority was commissioning expertise in the voluntary and community sector to support people with hearing loss, and this was confirmed by what people told us.

Further actions to address the areas for improvement have been included in the Continuous Improvement Plan for 2025/26 and will be monitored quarterly by the Continuous Improvement Group. An update on progress will be included within the Quality Assurance Report for 2025/26.

### **3. SURVEY FEEDBACK**

As part of the national Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) all Local Authorities are required to undertake an annual survey of people who use their services, and a similar survey every two years for carers. The results of these surveys are published which allows regional and national comparisons.

The most recent survey of people who use services was undertaken in 2025. Performance improved in four of the seven measures compared to the previous year, and reduced very slightly for the remaining three measures. The measures where there have been the most significant improvements are:

- The proportion of people who use services who feel safe and secure (improved from 75.1% to 76.5%).
- The proportion of people who use services who have as much social contact as they would like (improved from 53.3% to 53.7%).

For the three measures where performance had decreased slightly, all are still expected to compare very well regionally and nationally.

- Overall satisfaction of people who use service with their care and support (reduced from 71.3% to 68.5%).
- Proportion of people who use services who find it easy to find information about services (reduced from 80.0% to 78.3%).
- Proportion of people who use services who say that those services have made them feel safe and secure (reduced from 94.3% to 94.0%)

An action plan is in place to review the current Information and Advice offer following completion of a maturity assessment, as well as a project to improve information and advice using AI technology. Satisfaction of people who use services will be further explored through the commissioning team's interaction with care providers.

The carers survey is completed every two years and was last undertaken in 2024. Performance improved in four of the five when compared to the previous year and reduced very slightly for the remaining measure. The measures with the most significant improvements are:

- The proportion of carers with as much social contact as they would like (improved from 36.9% to 42.4%).
- Overall satisfaction of carers with adult social care services (improved from 52.1% to 57.9%).
- The proportion of carers who find it easy to find information about services (improved from 77.8% to 80.7%).

Hartlepool consistently performs well in these surveys with performance ranking highly regionally and nationally.

#### **4. SAFEGUARDING QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK**

The Tees Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) uses a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) to assess how organisations perform against the following standards:

1. The organisation has a Safeguarding Adults Policy / Strategy in place and a senior staff member that has the responsibility to 'champion' safeguarding.
2. Safeguarding Practice is safe, effective and person centred.
3. Your organisation has a focus on the need for preventing abuse and neglect.
4. Your organisation has written guidance & procedures for handling complaints and allegations against staff which is clearly accessible to all staff.
5. Your organisation can assure the Board that the learning, recommendations and key findings from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and Other Reviews are effectively implemented within your organisation and disseminated to the appropriate staff.
6. The organisation's staff supervision policy and reflective practice supports effective safeguarding. It recognises that skilled and knowledgeable supervisions focused on

outcomes for adults is critical in safeguarding work and enable staff to work confidently and competently with difficult and sensitive situations.

7. All staff and elected members (where appropriate) working within the organisation should receive appropriate training and work within an environment to enable them to competently respond to safeguarding concerns and meet the needs of adults at risk.
8. Service provision commissioned by partners meets the individual needs of adults who are most at risk of abuse or neglect.

As a statutory partner of the TSAB, the Council is required to complete the QAF every two years. The latest self-assessment was submitted in November 2024 and the outcome reported to TSAB in March 2025. The overall rating achieved was green, with a number of areas of good practice highlighted including:

- The Competency Framework for Safeguarding Adults that has been implemented.
- The increased uptake of safeguarding adults training by Elected Members.
- The Adult Social Care Newsletter, which is produced on a quarterly basis and shared with all internal staff, allowing HBC to share key safeguarding information and to disseminate learning from reviews.
- The sharing of information throughout National Safeguarding Adults Week and also via Hartbeat, the free magazine for local residents.

There were some recommendations made, relating primarily to updating policies and documents, which included:

- Strengthening the Adult Safeguarding Policy by referencing the legal frameworks that underpin safeguarding practice.
- Updating the Domestic Abuse Policy to include specific reference to Adult Safeguarding.
- Reviewing Business Continuity and Think Family approaches and simplifying process flowcharts.
- Updating contact details in the Making Safeguarding Personal leaflet.

These actions are all underway and will be complete by June 2025.

In addition to the TSAB QAF, there is a Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework and Action Plan within Hartlepool Borough Council, which tracks progress at a local level and is monitored through local safeguarding surgeries and the Continuous Improvement Group.

The HBC QAF and surgeries with managers focus on:

- data recording, reporting and analysis;
- learning from audits and peer review;
- learning from safeguarding adults reviews;
- practitioner learning and local practice; and
- Making Safeguarding Personal.

Hartlepool data is shared with TSAB and has been used to monitor performance against four key indicators in 2024/25:

1. Percentage of Section 42 enquiries that involved an adult with a previous enquiry in a rolling 12 month period. TSAB target is 25%, HBC performance as of Q3 2024/25 is 24% (target exceeded).

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2. Percentage of those involved in safeguarding enquiries who were asked their desired outcome. TSAB target is 95%, HBC performance is 97% (target exceeded).
3. Percentage of those involved in safeguarding enquiries who were satisfied with their outcome. TSAB target is 90%, HBC performance is 91% (target exceeded).
4. Percentage of those involved in safeguarding enquiries where risk was reduced or removed. TSAB target is 90%, HBC performance is 93% (target exceeded).

The percentage of people with repeat referrals has reduced significantly during 2024/25 after the target was not achieved the previous year. Analysis showed that a significant proportion of repeat referrals in 2023/24 related to one care facility where there are no Hartlepool residents. A regional approach has been taken to provide additional oversight in this service and the proportion of repeat referrals has reduced significantly due to proactive intervention.

Targets relating to Making Safeguarding Personal have all been exceeded which is positive.

Achievements in 2024/25

- Development of the Team Around the Care Setting approach which involves a named Social Worker or Social Care Officer allocated to each care home, working alongside the Commissioned Services Team link officer and the relevant Adult Safeguarding Officer to increase oversight of services, share intelligence and take a proactive approach to any low-level concerns.
- Supported TSAB 'spotlight on' campaigns raising awareness of Transitional Safeguarding and Discriminatory Abuse as well as National Safeguarding Adults Week.
- The Power BI performance tool which allows analysis of real time data is well embedded and is used to spot trends, improve consistency and quality and provide partners with intelligence.
- Internal Audit completed a review of adult safeguarding policies, governance and risk management processes in July 2024. The audit found that there was satisfactory assurance and there were no recommendations or actions required.

Key findings from the CQC Assessment relating to Adult Safeguarding include:

- There were effective systems, processes and practices to safeguard people from abuse and neglect.
- The local authority worked with the Safeguarding Adults Board and partners to deliver a co-ordinated approach to safeguarding.
- There was a strong multi-agency safeguarding partnership, with clear roles and responsibilities for identifying and responding to concerns.
- Staff told us they had relevant training, support and supervision.
- There was a clear understanding of the safeguarding risks in the local area with plans in place to address them.
- Lessons were learned when people experienced serious abuse or neglect and action taken to reduce future risks and drive best practice.
- There were effective processes in place to manage risks around Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) assessments.
- There was a system to ensure consistency in decision making in relation to whether safeguarding concerns progressed to a safeguarding enquiry.

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- The local authority focused on preventing abuse and neglect through their community led approach and multi-disciplinary working.
- Safeguarding enquiries were carried out with the person's wishes and best interests at the centre.
- Providers told us the local authority was very person focused and responsive to safeguarding concerns.
- People were supported to participate in the safeguarding process as much as they wanted and helped to understand safeguarding.

**5. AUDIT ACTIVITY**

In addition to case file audits, which are routinely undertaken each month by Team Managers, ad hoc audits are undertaken when issues arise. In 2024/25 audit activity within adult social care included:

**First Contact**

A themed audit of first contact arrangements, focusing on the interface between the Integrated Single Point of Access (ISPA) and the Support Hub. The audit reviewed 80 cases that had been referred to ISPA from the community during November and December 2024 but which had not resulted in further action such as a Care Act Assessment, reablement or signposting to the Support Hub. The outcome for the cases had been recorded as signposting / advice / other services. The audit found that:

- The majority of the cases audited had come from local GPs, the Police or North East Ambulance Service (NEAS).
- There were no examples of any cases originating from GPs, the Police or NEAS being redirected to the Support Hub.
- Decisions to signpost to advice and other services were not clearly articulated or evidenced.
- There was a lack of evidence on whether a carer was involved and whether services had been offered and declined.

As a result of the audit Assistant Team Managers are now more actively involved in decision-making, with the Support Hub being explored as an option as a matter of course. It was also identified that there was a need to raise awareness of the Support Hub offer with GPs, the Police and NEAS. While Social Prescribers are well connected to the Support Hub, this did not seem to be influencing referrals made by GPs to ISPA. This will be addressed during 2025/26.

**Support for Unpaid Carers**

Following a decision to commission Hartlepool Carers to undertake carers assessments on behalf of adult social care, a team of 7 auditors audited 42 cases where unpaid carers were receiving support, including 14 carers receiving direct payments. During the process, feedback was also obtained from 9 carers.

The audit found that

- the assessments completed by Hartlepool Carers were completed in a timely manner; outcome focussed and strength based; person led and jargon free.

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- The impact of caring on the carer was clear with good examples of where Hartlepool Carers had signposted carers to relevant services such as financial advice, their own offers for wellbeing support at the college and access to their caravan for short breaks.
- Staff spoke positively about the supervision and support they received and feedback from carers was excellent: they felt listened to and supported by Hartlepool Carers.
- Direct Payments were audited effectively with evidence of receipts / spend being seen.
- There was sometimes too much information on the person who was cared for in the assessment and there were some issues with recording on CareFirst that needed clarifying.
- Contingency planning for carers was not always particularly robust with the Emergency Duty Team being listed as the point of contact if there was carer breakdown.
- There were no examples of signposting of carers to Mobilise, the commissioned service that provides online support to carers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The findings of the audit have been shared with Hartlepool Carers and actions agreed to address recording, contingency planning and promotion of Mobilise.

Data quality audit for the proportion of people who were not at home 91 days after being discharged from hospital into reablement or rehabilitation services (a national performance indicator where Hartlepool's performance was below the national average in 2023/24). The audit identified that 7 people had been excluded from the numerator for this performance measure despite fulfilling the criteria to be included. If these people had been included performance would have been 86.9% which is above the England average. The data issues that were identified have now been addressed and performance is expected to improve in the data return for 2024/25.

External challenge is also welcomed and in July 2024 day services provided at the Centre for Independent Living for adults with learning disabilities and autism were audited by the National Autistic Society and achieved Advanced Accreditation for demonstrating standards of excellence in supporting autistic people within a day setting. The accreditation was awarded following an in-depth assessment that included interviews with staff, reviews of support plans, observation of activities and a survey of people who use the service.

The following summary feedback was provided following the assessment:

- The Autism Accreditation Committee found clear evidence from the report that staff at the Hartlepool Day Service have a robust working knowledge of evidence-informed approaches associated with good autism practice. They can adapt these specialist approaches so that support is highly person-centred and tailored to individual abilities, interests, preferences and challenges.
- Each autistic person develops skills in communicating and socially interacting with others. They become more confident in carrying out tasks independently and in being empowered to make their own choices which helps them to have greater control and self-autonomy in their lives. They enjoy an increasing range of sensory experiences whilst developing regulation strategies to help them avoid sensory overload.
- Support enables autistic people to take part in activities which are purposeful and engaging and which promotes their emotional well-being and social inclusion. Proactive

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and preventative strategies are employed to help each autistic individual avoid anxiety or distress and to help them understand and regulate their emotions.

- Case studies highlight insight into positive outcomes achieved by individuals from accessing bespoke programmes of support.
- Whilst some areas for development are identified in the report it is considered that these come under the realm of building upon existing good practice and do not indicate gaps or inconsistencies related to fundamental principles of good practice.

**6. PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING**

The overall position in relation to Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework measures is very positive. For 11 of the 22 measures, Hartlepool's outcomes are in the top 10 nationally, of 153 councils. Experience of people who use services and carers compares particularly well based on survey feedback.

Regular Performance Challenge meetings take place with the Managing Director using local data as well as regional benchmarking information that is compiled through NE ADASS.

Rollout of reports using the Power Bi tool has continued and now includes a range of new interactive and dynamic Power Bi dashboards that allow managers to view real time data on a range of areas, including caseloads, waiting times, residential & nursing admissions and safeguarding activity. The latest dashboard now provides predictive levels of service over the next 1 to 3 years.

A Power Bi Development Group meets regularly to prioritise delivery of new or amended reports, based on feedback from senior managers, as well as to share learning.

The Head of Strategic Commissioning chairs the NE ADASS Performance Group and has instigated a regional Power Bi Development Subgroup supporting information sharing and learning across all of the Councils in the region, which is well attended by all NE councils.

Work on performance benchmarking continues to develop and Hartlepool is currently leading on the development of a Power Bi dashboard for Tees Community Equipment Service, moving from a static, historic and non-interactive approach to a modern, dynamic, interactive easily accessible tool that will allow partners to interrogate information in any required way.

**7. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Council has a Workforce Development Programme which recognises that staff are motivated and committed when they are supported well and allowed to grow. This programme covers a range of areas including Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Health & Safety, Management, Personal Effectiveness and Wellbeing.

There is also a comprehensive Learning & Development Programme for Adult & Community Based Services which includes a wide range of informal development

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opportunities such as bite size training on the Care Act, Direct Payments and Commissioning as well as more formal development opportunities. Learning & Development offered includes: Best Interest Assessor training and legal updates, Coaching in Practice and Supervision, Mental Capacity Act awareness and a range of Safeguarding Adult training commissioned via TSAB.

Staff have been supported to access a wide range of development opportunities through the Learning & Development Programme for Adult & Community Based Services during 2024/25 including:

- One member of staff has completed the Social Work Apprenticeship and is now working in a qualified Social Work role. In total, four staff have now completed the Social Work Apprenticeship.
- One member of staff has completed the Occupational Therapy Apprenticeship and is now working in a qualified Occupational Therapy role.
- Four Social Workers have completed their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (which is a 100% success rate).
- Six Social Workers have qualified as Practice Educators – three at Stage 1 and three at Stage 2
- Five members of staff have qualified as Best Interest Assessors.
- One member of staff has completed a Level 5 Award in Digital Leadership.
- Four Occupational Therapists have completed a train the trainer award.

The number of staff undertaking significant developments that support career progression evidences the commitment of the Council to developing the existing workforce within Adult Social Care.

Staff also have access to safeguarding training commissioned by TSAB on behalf of the four local authority areas via the Me Learning platform with 965 courses related to adult safeguarding completed by HBC staff in 2024/25.

Bespoke development opportunities are also considered when required and in November 2024, in response to issues staff raised regarding areas for development, a Celebrating Diversity Week was held. This included training on gender identity, forced marriage and honour based abuse, diversity and inclusion in dementia care, intersectionality and inclusive social work practice and disability rights. A range of resources were also promoted covering working with interpreters, culturally appropriate care and support for carers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

## **8. FEEDBACK FROM THE WORKFORCE**

The Employer Standards Health Check is a national project involving an annual survey measuring how well employers deliver the Employer Standards for Social Workers, how employees perceive their working environment and what factors influence them to engage with their work and stay with the organisation.

The eight standards that are covered within the survey are:

- Strong and clear social work framework



- Effective workforce planning systems
- Safe workloads and case allocation
- Wellbeing
- Supervision
- Continuing professional development
- Professional registration
- Strategic partnerships

The results of the 2025 survey of social workers are scores out of a hundred and are categorised as either; relatively poor outcomes – a clear sign that improvement is needed (score of 0-50); moderate outcomes – room for improvement (score of 51-74); or good outcomes – to be celebrated (score of 75-100).

All scores for Hartlepool were ranked as good outcomes which were to be celebrated. Scores against each standard ranged from 83-93 which is incredibly positive and is reflected in high retention rates within the social care workforce.

Areas where outcomes were particularly high related to:

- Access to team managers, senior leaders and professional leads
- Access to training and development
- Feeling safe in the workplace
- Access to supportive supervision
- The organisation having an inclusive culture and being actively committed to non-discriminatory practice
- Being supported to maintain professional standards

The areas where outcomes were lowest (in the context of all outcomes being categorised as good outcomes to be celebrated) were:

- Managing increasing complexity and severity of need
- Being required to do more with less resources
- Proportion of time spent on administrative duties

The feedback is very similar to that received in previous years and the outcome of the Health Check is shared with the workforce along with feedback on actions being taken in response. There are a range of actions planned for 2025/26, including piloting new technologies, which aim to address the proportion of time spent on administrative duties which is expected to create more capacity for the workforce to work with people with the most complex needs and to address workload pressures.

## **9. CELEBRATING SUCCESS**

Celebrating success and sharing positive feedback is really important in terms of staff morale and motivation and this is done through regular Adult Social Care newsletters and staff briefings. Feedback has been provided on:

- performance against adult social care outcomes framework measures;
- staff successfully completing apprenticeships and qualifications;

- learning from compliments and complaints: and
- preparation for CQC assessment.

Staff briefings were also used to focus on language and labelling and equality and diversity, with feedback from the workforce used to inform the Celebrating Diversity programme.

In November Hartlepool Borough Council received a Silver Award at the Social Worker of the Year Awards for Supportive Social Work Employer Award 2024. This award recognises the work that takes place across Adult Services and Children's Services to support the social care workforce and is a significant achievement. The nomination highlighted that:

- Hartlepool Borough Council is an outstanding social work employer. The organisation has a culture of high support, high expectation and high challenge leading to excellence in social work practice.
- The Council invests in supporting, developing and retaining the social care workforce and receives excellent feedback from staff who want to work in Hartlepool and are committed to the town, the Council and the people they serve.
- The most common words people working in adult social care used to describe the organisational culture were: supportive; person centred; enabling; and proactive.

## **10. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS**

A review of complaints and compliments received is carried out on an annual basis with a clear focus on learning from and responding to complaints that identify areas where improvements can be made.

The report for 2024/25 will be approved by the Adult & Community Based Services Committee in July 2024. During 2024/25 32 compliments were recorded and 19 complaints were investigated. 5 complainants contacted the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in 2024/25 as they weren't happy with the outcome of their complaint to the Council regarding Adult Social Care. In 4 of the 5 cases the LGSCO decided not to investigate and in the remaining case the LGSCO investigates and found no fault with the actions taken by the Council. The report provides a summary of the complaints investigated and actions taken as a result.

Compliments received are routinely shared with the staff member or team concerned and feedback is shared more widely through staff briefings and newsletters.

## **11. CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS**

There has been a significant amount of quality assurance work undertaken in 2024/25 and the overall picture is very positive in terms of the quality of frontline practice and the performance of Adult Social Care. It is particularly pleasing to see the positive feedback from people who are using services, and to note that excellent performance continues to be maintained in the context of the challenges facing adult social care on a national basis.

Actions to address any issues raised through quality assurance activities are captured in a Continuous Improvement Plan which is monitored by the Continuous Improvement Group. The Annual Quality Assurance Report is endorsed by the Adult & Community Based Services Committee.

# ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

26 June 2025



**Subject:** ANNUAL REPORT OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 2024/25

**Report of:** Executive Director of Adult & Community Based Services

**Decision Type:** Non-Key.

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

**Hartlepool will be a place:**

- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives (People).

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To present to members the Annual Report of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024/25.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Annual Complaints and Compliments Report provides information on complaints related to adult social care that have been received and responded to, as well as compliments received during the reporting period.

## 4. ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLIMENTS / COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 The report is attached as **Appendix A** and provides an analysis of complaints and compliments and demonstrates learning that has occurred and actions implemented as a result.
- 4.2 The report includes:
- Complaints and compliments received in 2024/25
  - Outcomes of complaints;
  - Learning lessons and service improvement; and
  - Complaints considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25.

- 4.3 During 2024/25, 32 compliments were recorded relating to adult social care.
- 4.4 A total of 27 complaints were received during 2024/25. The number of complaints received has increased by 1 from the previous year.
- 4.5 Of the 27 complaints received, 2 complaints were resolved within 24 hours and 6 complaints were not considered further leaving 19 complaints investigated, one more than in the previous year.
- 4.6 Of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25, 18 complaints have concluded local statutory complaints processes and 1 complaint remains ongoing and will be carried forward to 2025/26.

## 5. FEEDBACK FROM THE CARE QUALITY COMMISSION

- 5.1 As part of the Care Quality Commission assessment of adult social care services during 2024/25 it was noted that the complaints procedure was flexible to ensure that the needs of complainants were met and that learning from complaints was shared and discussed within management forums to ensure improvements identified were communicated to the workforce

## 6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	None
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	Not applicable
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>	None
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	Not applicable

**7. RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 It is recommended that members of the Adult and Community Based Services Committee approve the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2024/25 and note that the report will be published online.

**8. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 It is a requirement that an Annual Report regarding complaints is prepared, presented to the relevant Policy Committee and published on the Council's website.

**9. CONTACT OFFICER**

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Executive Director of Adult & Community Based Services  
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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 02/06/25
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 30/05/25
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 02/06/25

# **Annual Report of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024/25**



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## 1. Executive Summary

In accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, this report sets out the complaints received by Hartlepool Borough Council's adult social care during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

How adult social care responds to complaints and any learning arising from them is an integral part of how we improve our services. This also aligns with being open, transparent and accountable.

The feedback we receive from compliments about our adult social care services is also included in this report. Compliments are seen as an indication of good outcomes for those who have used our services.

Both the complaints and compliments received regarding adult social care serve to provide wider lessons about the quality of our adult social care services.

### **Summary for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

- 75% of complaints were received electronically in 2024/25.
- 27 complaints were received in 2024/25 compared to 26 complaints in the previous year. This represents an increase of 1 complaint. However, 8 of 27 complaints received in 2024/25 did not progress to investigation leaving 19 complaints for investigation.
- There was an increase of 3 complaints investigated in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24.
- 1 of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25 was managed and responded to jointly with health in accordance with statutory complaint regulations.
- 1 of the 19 complainants was represented by a Solicitor in bringing their complaint whereas no complainants chose to have an Advocate support them with their complaint in 2024/25.
- 5 complainants referred their complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during 2024/25. This included a complaint that was investigated in 2023/24.
- 1 of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25 remained ongoing as at 31 March 2025 and has been carried forward to 2025/26.
- 32 compliments were recorded relating to adult social care in 2024/25.
- This annual report will be published on the Council's website.



## 2. Introduction

In accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, this annual report covers the complaints received about adult social care services during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The feedback we receive from compliments about our adult social care services is also included in this report.

The annual report sets out:

- An overview of the complaints framework;
- An analysis of compliments and complaints received by adult social care services during the reporting period;
- An overview of the adult social care complaints adjudicated upon by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during the reporting period; and
- Highlights the action taken and improvements made to adult social care services following complaint investigations.

The Council's adult social care services encourage and welcome compliments and complaints as a means of continual assessment of the services we provide. Complaints are investigated and, where appropriate, redress is made. Compliments and complaints are valued as an important source of feedback in helping to improve the quality of our adult social care services. Complaint outcomes provide evidence of the action we have taken to learn from the complaints received and drive continual improvement.

## 3. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of a service that is being delivered, or the failure to deliver a service. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman define a complaint as *“an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or on its behalf by a contactor or partner) that requires a response.”*

## 4. Who can make a complaint?

A complaint can be made by:

- A person who is in receipt of an adult social care service;
- A person who has been refused an adult social care service for which they think they are eligible for;
- A person who is, or is likely to be, affected by the action, decision or omission of the service which is the subject of the complaint; or
- A carer acting on their own behalf.

A person may choose for someone else to represent them in the matter of a complaint. With the person's signed consent, their representative can make a complaint and act on their behalf. In the case of a person who lacks mental capacity (within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005) to give their informed signed consent, a representative may make a complaint on behalf of the person, but the statutory complaint regulations set out that the Council must be satisfied the representative making the complaint is acting in the person's best interests.

## 5. How can someone make a complaint?

There are several ways a person can make a complaint. Adult social care services have a publicly accessible Factsheet which outlines the various ways someone can make a complaint together with some information about the Council's adult social care complaints procedure. A complaint can be made:

- Verbally - in person or by telephone; or
- In writing - by letter or by filling in our complaint form and posting it to us;
- Electronically - by email or by filling in our online complaint form through the Council's website.

Every effort is made to assist a person in making a complaint and any member of staff can accept a complaint. Most complaints are sent directly to the adult social care complaints team.

## 6. Method used to submit a complaint in 2024/25

For complaints received during 2024/25, 74% were received electronically. The method of contact is broken down as follows:



41% of complaints received were from someone who used the online electronic complaint form.



33% of complaints received were from someone who sent an email to us.



7.5% of complaints received were from someone who telephoned to make a complaint.



18.5% of complaints received were from someone who posted a complaint form or letter to us.

## 7. Adult social care complaint framework

The adult social care complaint function sits within the Quality and Review Team under the management of the Head of Service (Quality and Review). The remit of the Complaints Manager's function is to:

- Develop, manage and administer the adult social care complaints procedure;
- Provide assistance and advice to those people who wish to make a complaint;
- Oversee the investigation of complaints;
- Monitor and report on complaints activity; and
- Support and train staff.

Adult social care staff will always try to resolve problems or concerns before they escalate into complaints and this ensures that, wherever possible, complaints are kept to a minimum. The Council's adult social care complaints procedure aims to be as accessible as possible and is available for anyone to access on the Council's website. It is flexible to ensure that the needs of the complainant are paramount and allows for a complaint handling approach based upon the best way to reach a satisfactory resolution.

The adult social complaints procedure is underpinned by:

- Being fair, clear, robust and accessible;
- Support being available to those wishing to make a complaint;
- Timely resolution following a complaint investigation;
- Action taken following complaints to improve the quality of the service provided; and
- Monitoring as a means of improving performance.

Good complaint handling involves:

- Keeping the complainant informed and at the centre of the complaints process;
- Being open, accountable and transparent;
- Responding to complaints in a way that is fair and reasonable;
- Being committed to try and get things right when they have gone wrong; and
- Seeking to continually improve services.

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009:

- Sets a 12 month time limit from when the subject matter being complained about occurred or came to the attention of the person making the complaint, to when a complaint may be made. After this time, a complaint will not normally be considered although there is discretion to accept a complaint after the 12 month time limit if the Council is satisfied that the complainant had good reason(s) for not making the complaint within the time limit and it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly;
- Places a duty on adult social care and NHS bodies to coordinate the handling of complaints received across their respective jurisdictions and provide a joint response;

- Sets a mandatory timescale of 3 working days to acknowledge receipt of a complaint; and
- Allows for a maximum timescale of 6 months to investigate and respond to a complaint.

Some complaints can take considerably longer to investigate than others and the statutory timescale provides a flexible approach to complaint response times depending upon the nature and complexity of the complaint. The person allocated to investigate a complaint usually seeks to negotiate the timescale for responding to the complaint with the complainant wherever possible. There are a range of factors that can impact upon a timescale such as the number of points of complaint for investigation, the availability of key people and conducting interviews, reading material relevant to the complaint, consideration of all available information and writing a report or proportionate response.

If, at the end of the adult social care complaints procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome and/or in the way which their complaint has been handled, they may refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, the independent body who investigates complaints about Councils. The time limit for raising a complaint with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is 12 months but, like Councils, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman may choose to waive the time limit if there is good reason(s) to do so.

Learning from complaints is shared and discussed within relevant management forums to ensure that the improvements identified are cascaded throughout the workforce.

## 8. Compliments received in 2024/25

During 2024/25, 32 compliments were received relating to adult social care services.

The compliments received range from an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card to written communication. They broadly reflect the work being delivered across adult social care with someone expressing their thanks for a piece of equipment which improves their daily life as well as a general appreciation of the social work teams who have made a difference to their lives.

The table below provides some examples of the compliments received during the reporting period.

Service area	Compliment
ISPA	<i>"I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you for your lovely support, especially during such a difficult time. You made sure all of my dad's needs were met with care and dignity, and that means the world to us. You've got a heart of gold — keep doing what you're doing, because you truly make a difference."</i>

Preventative Mental Health Team	<i>"I just wanted to let you know what 'X' has done for my family in the last year or so. To that end 'X' has been incredible. She has dealt with my family with endless compassion, patience, understanding and competence. She has been invaluable in helping me understand the situation my family are in and the support that is available to us. She has given me such peace of mind that I cannot adequately put into words. She is a credit to herself and your organisation and I wanted to try and ensure it is recognised."</i>
User Property and Finance Team (and other service areas)	<i>"Thanks for your email. I was going to contact you about this but now I don't need to. And thanks for the information about the refund. Of all the organisations I have been in touch with since my mother was diagnosed with dementia, Hartlepool Council is the only one where every contact (with social care officers, finance staff, receptionists, registrar service, etc.) has been great, and I have never had to chase up anyone. Everyone who said they would get back to me always did. This has made the last few years easier than it could have been. Please pass this on to the Chief Executive and thank you for what you have done in your role over the last 18 months."</i>
Locality Team	<i>"Thank you so very much for all your support over the last few years with both my mother and my father. It has been a really difficult time for me and you have been absolutely invaluable not just in helping me through all the administrative complexities but also in giving me advice and moral support. I can't tell you how much it has meant to me to know that I could pick up the phone to you and that you would understand what was going on and would be able to apply friendly common sense to it all. Your kindness and professionalism has made all the difference and I will be forever grateful to you."</i>
Occupational Therapy Team	<i>"Would just like to say thank you for all your help and advice. The equipment you have provided has made my life a lot easier and safer so thanks."</i>
Young Adults Transition and Learning Disability Team	<i>"Thank you for everything, you are simply the best."</i>
Locality Team	<i>"Thank you for your care, help and guidance when looking after 'X'. It was a great comfort knowing we had someone to rely on in troublesome times. Your support was a great help."</i>

## 9. Complaints received in 2024/25

A total of 27 complaints were received during 2024/25, 1 more than in the previous year.

Of the 27 complaints received, 2 complaints were resolved within 24 hours and 6 complaints were not considered further, leaving 19 complaints investigated. This is an increase of 3 complaints investigated from the previous year.

Of the 6 complaints not considered further, this was because:

- 2 complaints were withdrawn by the complainants and therefore not considered any further;
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the Council was not satisfied the representative making the complaint was acting in the deceased person's best interests;
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the person making the complaint was not eligible to do so;
- 1 complaint was withdrawn by the Council when the complainant did not communicate further despite repeated efforts by the Council to engage with the complainant; and
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the matters being complained about needed to follow the adult safeguarding procedure rather than the complaints procedure.

Of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25:

- 3 complaints were received directly from the person concerned;
- 5 complainants who signed their consent for someone else to represent them and act on their behalf in the matter of the complaint;
- 4 complainants represented a deceased relative in bringing their complaint; and
- 7 complainants represented someone who lacked mental capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, 1 of whom chose to have a Solicitor represent them with their complaint.

1 of the 19 complaints investigated spanned both health and adult social care. In this case, a joint response from the relevant NHS health body and adult social care was sent to the complainant in accordance with statutory complaint regulations.

Complaints which are assessed upon receipt and determined to be complex are usually investigated by someone independent of the Council. This adds credibility and demonstrates accountability in the complaint handling process. In 2024/25, 3 of the 19 complaints investigated were allocated to an independent investigator, 15 complaints were investigated and responded to internally, and the remaining complaint was responded to by a contracted care provider acting on the Council's behalf.

The table below shows a breakdown of the complaints received by service area together with comparative data for the previous 2 years.

Service area	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Older Persons (including User Property and Finance)	12	10	10
Young Adult Transition and Learning Disability	2	1	1
Occupational Therapy (including Reablement)	1	4	5
Preventative Mental Health, AMHP, DoLS and Adult Safeguarding functions	6	3	4
Commissioned Services	6	8	4
Carers	0	0	0
<b>Total number of complaints received</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>

Of the 27 complaints received in 2024/25, 12 complaints were received within the older person's service followed by 6 complaints within the mental health/adult safeguarding area and 6 complaints about commissioned services. There were 2 complaints received in the learning disability service area, leaving 1 complaint within Occupational Therapy.

There have been increases in the number of complaints received about older person's services, learning disability services and mental health services / adult safeguarding. The number of complaints about occupational therapy and commissioned services has decreased. There have been no complaints received from carers over the last three years.

Of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25, 18 complaints have concluded the adult social care complaints procedure, and 1 complaint remains ongoing which will be carried forward to 2025/26.

## 10. Complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25

There were 5 complainants who referred their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25. Of these:

- 2 of the 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had been investigated internally in 2024/25. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided not to investigate the complaints. This was because in 1 complaint they found that it was unlikely that further investigation would find evidence of fault or injustice and, in the other complaint, that an investigation would not lead to any different findings or outcomes;



- 1 of the 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25 had been investigated by someone independent of the Council in 2023/24. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided to investigate the complaint, but they found no fault with the Council's actions;
- 1 of the 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was responded to by a care provider acting on the Council's behalf in 2024/25. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided not to investigate the complaint because they found an investigation would not lead to any different findings or outcomes; and
- In the case of the remaining complaint, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided that as there was an ongoing independent complaint investigation which the Council had commissioned, it was not proportionate for the Ombudsman to also consider the complaint at the same time.

## 11. Actions and improvements from complaints investigated in 2024/25

An integral part of complaints management is ensuring that when shortcomings in service delivery are identified, proportionate and timely action is taken to remedy any personal injustice to the complainant and action is taken to improve the quality of service being provided.

The table below provides some examples of the complaints received during the reporting period and the actions taken as a result.

Complaint	Actions taken
<p>The complainant was unhappy with the delay she had encountered between the completion of an assessment and the implementation of the support plan.</p> <p>The complaint was investigated by a Head of Service.</p>	<p>The Head of Service met with the complainant and investigated the matters raised. An apology was provided to the complainant because it was found the time needed to implement the direct payment arrangements (a named Personal Assistant) had not been explained clearly or interim commissioned services offered whilst the direct payment was being arranged. The complainant was grateful for the apology and explanation provided.</p> <p>As a result of the complaint, staff were reminded to ensure that when a delay is likely (when exceptional circumstances within a Support Plan requires senior management approval), families are made aware of the steps that need to be undertaken and the implications of this so they can make informed interim decisions.</p>



<p>The complainant was unhappy with aspects of his family member's care.</p> <p>The complaint was investigated internally.</p>	<p>A face-to-face discussion with the complainant was arranged which allowed for a meaningful conversation to take place and a resolution was found which the complainant expressed his satisfaction with.</p> <p>The approach of a face-to-face discussion to try and resolve the matter was welcomed by the complainant who expressed that he had felt listened to.</p>
<p>The complainant raised a number of concerns about his interactions with adult social care staff with regards to his mother's assisted technology.</p> <p>The complaint was investigated by a Head of Service.</p>	<p>Having investigated the matters raised, the Head of Service found that whilst adult social care staff had offered advice and information they believed to be correct, this had not always been accurate. An apology as well as an acknowledgment of the frustration this had caused was made to the complainant. The Head of Service addressed the inaccurate information that had been given directly with the staff members concerned.</p> <p>Additionally, as a training and learning opportunity, the scenario being complained about was used as an anonymous example within the relevant service area's team meeting.</p>
<p>The complainant was unhappy with matters relating to her father's care in a contracted care home as well as her interactions with the Social Worker about her father's move to another care home.</p>	<p>The Head of Service visited the complainant to discuss and understand all her concerns before investigating them.</p> <p>It was found that a 'Best Interests' meeting should have been facilitated by the Social Worker or the Community Psychiatric Nurse which would have enabled a discussion about all available options. Options should have been explored further within the meeting, including a plan on how to safely support any move to another care home.</p> <p>An apology and explanation was provided to the complainant and recommended learning was identified across both adult social care and health.</p> <p>The complainant expressed her appreciation for the time taken to listen, understand and investigate her concerns. She was pleased to know that training would be implemented and practice improved which would be adopted more widely.</p>

<p>The complainant expressed, amongst other things, her dissatisfaction with not being provided with a contracted care home's action plan.</p> <p>The complaint was investigated by someone independent of the Council.</p>	<p>The independent investigator recommended that the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board should review their current policy to consider a mechanism to include feedback to families and make this explicit within the policy.</p> <p>This recommendation was accepted by the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board so that families are clearly aware of what information may and may not be shared.</p>
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## 12. Conclusion

The Council's adult social care function will continue to monitor its complaint handling process and performance so that further improvements can be made to the experience of someone making a complaint and to continue ensuring that every complaint counts as a learning opportunity to improve the quality of services.

# ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

26 June 2025



**Subject:** CARE QUALITY COMMISSION ASSESSMENT OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

**Report of:** Executive Director of Adult & Community Based Services

**Decision Type:** Non-Key

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

**Hartlepool will be a place:**

- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives (People).
- with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community (Organisation).

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To present to the Adult & Community Based Services Committee the outcome of the Care Quality Commission assessment of Hartlepool Borough Council's Adult Social Care Services.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Assessing how local authorities are meeting their Care Act duties is a new responsibility for the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Assessments will be completed for all 153 local authorities nationally over a two year period.
- 3.2 An assessment framework has been developed focusing on four key themes:
- Working with people
  - Providing support
  - How the local authority ensures safety within the system
  - Leadership
- There are a range of sub-headings within each theme which are referenced in the assessment report.

Further detail regarding the assessment framework and process, along with all reports published to date can be found at [Local authority assessments - Care Quality Commission](#).

- 3.3 Assessments consider a range of evidence sources including the experiences of people using adult social care services, feedback from staff and leaders and feedback from partners. Evidence is gathered through:
- A Local Authority Information Return and Self Assessment
  - Onsite activity including focus groups and interviews
  - Case tracking
  - National performance and quality data
- 3.4 At the end of the assessment process the local authority receives an overall rating of Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good or Outstanding and a final assessment report is published on the CQC website. At the time of writing this report 36 reports have been published with 15 Councils rated as Requires Improvement, 20 rated as Good and 1 rated as Outstanding.
- 3.5 Hartlepool Borough Council received notification in May 2024 that an assessment would be completed within 6 months from that date. The Local Authority Information Return was submitted in June 2024 and Case Tracking information in October 2024. On site activity took place in the week commencing 11 November 2024 and a draft report was received in January 2025. Publication of the report was originally scheduled for March 2025 but was delayed until 14 May 2025 due to local elections.

#### **4. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME**

- 4.1 The overall rating of Hartlepool Borough Council's Adult Social Care Services is Good.
- 4.2 A significant number of strengths were identified in the overall summary:
- There was positive feedback from people about the services they received in Hartlepool. People told us they had good experiences of both Care Act assessment and carers assessments, from knowledgeable and caring staff. Outcomes for care and support focused on people's strengths, goals and wellbeing. Unpaid carers were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of accessing support, including time away from their caring role and spoke highly of services supporting them.
  - Most people could access information and advice, and their feedback was positive.
  - People had access to a range of approaches and organisations to prevent, reduce and delay their need for care and support. There was good feedback about reablement, intermediate care and timely access to equipment and adaptations which supported people to remain at home.
  - Wellbeing was embedded in the local authority and partner organisations' approach.

- People involved in co-production told us they had opportunities to be involved in different projects with the local authority including a parent carer forum, supported internships and community events.
- The care market in Hartlepool was small, however we heard people had choice and feedback on care and support settings commissioned by the local authority was positive.
- Relationships with external and internal partners were effective and included co-location, multi-agency working with arrangements to share information, discuss concerns and issues and plan resources. Most commissioned community and voluntary sector organisations had good relationships with staff and the local authority.
- The leadership at Hartlepool was visible and approachable. They were not isolated from the wider workforce or external partnerships. We heard how staff interacted and engaged well with people and partners. Adult social care demonstrated its vision: 'We all want to live in a place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us.'
- There was oversight of Care Act assessment and carer assessment waiting lists and these were well managed. Staff had a good understanding of how to manage risks. The local authority had reduced waiting lists and used real-time data to understand where the pressures were, and they were monitoring areas which required improvement.
- Governance and management arrangements were in place, and these provided visibility and assurance on key priorities. There was a line of sight on areas where there was a risk people might not achieve good outcomes.
- There were effective systems, processes and practices for safeguarding and a coordinated approach.
- Staff had the relevant support, supervision and training including trauma informed practice training following learning from a multi-agency safeguarding adult review.
- An Inequalities Working Group had been established by adult social care to support their workforce, and an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy was in place.
- The local authority was proud of its workforce with confident practitioners which reinforced an evidence-based approach. There were strategies for recruitment, retention and to support staff development. The local authority championed a 'grow your own' approach, looked for progression routes for new employees and feedback was sought from their teams to support continuous improvement.
- The local authority had a long-standing leadership team and there was an established workforce. Leaders worked regionally and sub-regionally, were part of practice forums and acted as reviewers for other local authorities.
- The development of community led solutions through the community hubs and integrated single point of access meant there was a focus on providing the right care in the right place and developing the partnerships to achieve this. The staff articulated how they used a strength-based

approach, focused on having good conversations, worked in partnership with people on clear outcomes and were able to measure impact. This transformation work supported improvement for people's choice and embedding strengths-based approaches, such as direct payments, independent living, and technology-enabled care. This aligned well with adult social care's ambition to achieve better outcomes and better lives.

- 4.3 There were also areas for improvement identified, mainly in relation to equity of outcomes:
- Organisations supporting people with sensory impairments felt that information and advice was not always available in a format which supported them.
  - People said co-production would benefit from a refresh.
  - Not all organisations reported having good relationships.
  - Making better use of data to support strategic planning.
  - Communication with some communities could be improved. Information and advice provided was not always accessible to those for whom it was being provided.
  - The local authority did not have a consistent approach to equity and understanding the diversity in communities or clear plans in place to reach out to seldom-heard groups.
  - The Adult Workforce Strategy Implementation Plan (April 2024) did not include clear actions and measurable outcomes.
- 4.4 In many of the areas identified for improvement, work was already underway and this was recognised by the CQC:
- The local authority had plans to improve communications, co-production and working in partnership with seldom heard communities.
  - The local authority recognised more work was needed in strengthening the analysis of data to support strategic planning and was developing an intelligence hub to use data across the council to deepen understanding of communities and gaps.
  - The local authority had clear plans to explore use of video and audio communications on the website to improve accessibility and was exploring the option of using QR codes for language translation.
  - The local authority acknowledged the need to work with all other ethnic communities to understand how they can make sure they are engaging with them and have the skills to offer them the support that they needed.
  - The local authority was commissioning expertise in the voluntary and community sector to support people with hearing loss, and this was confirmed by what people told us.
- 4.5 The full report can be found on the CQC website: [Local authority assessment reports - Care Quality Commission](#).
- 4.6 A Continuous Improvement Plan (attached as **Appendix 1**) has been developed which addresses the areas where the CQC identified that improvements could be made, as well as existing improvement priorities within adult social care.

## 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	There are no risks associated with this report.  Risks within adult social care are captured in an Adult Social Care Risk Register and regularly monitored. The CQC assessment states that ‘there were governance, management and accountability arrangements at all levels in the local authority; these provided visibility and assurance on quality, sustainability and risks to carry out Care Act duties’.
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no financial considerations associated with this report.
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	Not relevant.
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	The CQC assess how the Local Authority complies with the requirements of the Care Act 2014.
<b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>	There are no child and family poverty considerations specifically associated with this report, although it is recognised within the CQC assessment that deprivation is one of the main factors impacting on inequality in Hartlepool.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	The report identifies ensuring equity of outcomes as an area where improvements are required, and these areas are reflected in the Continuous Improvement Plan.
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no staffing considerations associated with this report. Preparation for assessment, the assessment process and the response to the assessment have been managed within existing staffing resources.
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no asset management considerations associated with this report.
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no environment, sustainability and climate change considerations associated with this report.
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	The outcome of the assessment is published on the CQC website and available to the public.

	The Continuous Improvement Plan identifies a range of opportunities to improve engagement and consultation with partners, providers and seldom heard groups within the local population.
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## 6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is recommended that Adult & Community Based Services Committee notes the outcome of the CQC assessment and endorses the Continuous Improvement Plan that has been developed for 2025/26.

## 7. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 The CQC has assessed how the Council is meeting the Care Act 2014 duties and has identified good practice and areas where improvements can be made. The Adult & Community Based Services Committee has oversight of adult social care services and needs to be assured that services are of a good standard and focused on continuous improvement.

## 8. CONTACT OFFICER

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 Email: [jill.harrison@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:jill.harrison@hartlepool.gov.uk)

Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 02/06/25
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 02/06/25
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 04/06/25



Improved accessibility of information and advice that supports people to support themselves.		
Action	Due Date	Lead Officers
Refresh adult social care content on the HBC website, ensuring that information is as accessible as possible for all communities.	July 2025	Leigh Keeble
Deliver the Innovation Fund project to pilot Artificial Intelligence within Hartlepool Now.	Dec 2025	Leigh Keeble / Trevor Smith
Implementation of Sign Video with QR codes in venues and access to British Sign Language interpreting.	Oct 2025	Neil Harrison / Leigh Keeble
Commission Information & Advice service for Black & Minority Ethnic communities and monitor outcomes.	June 2025	Trevor Smith / Leigh Keeble
Review outcomes from Mobilise service and consider future options.	Oct 2025	Trevor Smith / Leigh Keeble
Evaluate Digital Navigator outcomes and options to improve accessibility of offer.	Sept 2025	Leigh Keeble
Promote use of Entitled To / Benefits Maximisation support for all communities.	Ongoing	Leigh Keeble
Work with Citizenship Group, Sensory Loss groups and other seldom heard communities to review accessibility of information and advice, including easy read information on complaints and advocacy.	April 2026	Leigh Keeble / Neil Harrison

Streamlined processes to ensure that services remain person-centred and strengths based.		
Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Review the Resource Allocation System.	Mar 2026	David Ward / Sarah Ward
Review assessment documentation to reduce bureaucracy and embed CLS principles.	Dec 2025	Sarah Ward / Leigh Keeble
Implement Magic Notes.	Oct 2025	Trevor Smith / Leigh Keeble
Implement online financial assessment.	Dec 2025	Trevor Smith / Leigh Keeble
Targeted intervention to reduce waiting times for financial assessment / review.	Apr 2026	John Lovatt / Neil Harrison
Refresh Equipment Finder on Hartlepool Now.	Apr 2026	Leigh Keeble
Update Practice Standards to better reflect Community Led Support principles.	Apr 2026	Sarah Ward / Leigh Keeble
Agree Community Led Support next steps – embed approach on review, hospital discharge and in commissioning.	Apr 2026	Leigh Keeble
Explore a range of Artificial Intelligence solutions that promote opportunities for people to self-serve by automating front door processes, addressing access challenges and reducing demand.	Dec 2025	Leigh Keeble / Trevor Smith

<b>Improved Equity of Outcomes</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>
Review Diverse by Design self-assessment and how this could support local priorities.	Oct 2025	Leigh Keeble
Develop ASC Workforce Race Equality Standard Action Plan.	April 2025	Leigh Keeble
Develop a training programme for staff to address improved equity of outcomes.	April 2026	Leigh Keeble
Undertake a Practice Month focused on communication and accessibility.	Jan 2026	Leigh Keeble / ASC SMT
Work with the corporate Equality Diversity & Inclusion Group to promote training and awareness raising throughout the year and supplement with Adult Social Care activity as appropriate.	Dec 2025	Leigh Keeble
Targeted work with sensory loss providers to understand challenges.	Dec 2025	Neil Harrison / Leigh Keeble
Work with providers to promote supported internship opportunities.	Oct 2025	Trevor Smith / Leigh Keeble

<b>Increased opportunities for coproduction and engagement.</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>
Improved engagement with seldom heard groups through link workers and a refreshed Equity in Outcomes / Social Justice and Equality Group.	March 2026	Leigh Keeble / John Lovatt
Annual engagement event(s) with providers and community organisations supporting seldom heard groups.	March 2026	Leigh Keeble / Trevor Smith
Implement a Co-Production Framework within Adult Social Care.	March 2026	Leigh Keeble
Improve links with Healthwatch to support coproduction and engagement.	March 2026	Leigh Keeble / John Lovatt
Further develop aspirations and ambitions programme for young people.	March 2026	Leigh Keeble / Sarah Ward
Refresh Carers Strategy with input from key partners across health and social care and people with lived experience.	Dec 2025	Leigh Keeble / Trevor Smith
Refresh Dementia Strategy with input from key partners across health and social care and people with lived experience.	Dec 2025	Leigh Keeble / Trevor Smith
Refresh Autism Strategy with input from key partners across health and social care and people with lived experience.	Dec 2025	Neil Harrison

Increased opportunities to engage and involve the workforce		
Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Develop a programme of staff conversations.	Dec 2025	Leigh Keeble
Regular engagement through Staff Briefings/Director's Updates.	Ongoing	Jill Harrison
Promote recognition of achievements within the workforce through Social Worker of the Year Award nominations.	Jul 2025	Sarah Ward

Continued commitment to workforce development		
Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Review Workforce Strategy and produce a revised Action Plan.	Dec 2025	John Lovatt
Review and update the Workforce Development Plan to reflect priorities within the Continuous Improvement Plan.	Dec 2025	Sarah Ward / Leigh Keeble
Work with providers to better understand workforce issues in the wider care sector.	Mar 2026	Trevor Smith
Further promotion of social care career pathways linked to national and regional campaigns, including working with the Health & Social Care Academy as appropriate.	Ongoing	Trevor Smith / Leigh Keeble
Review feedback from Local Government Association Healthcheck and develop an action plan to address issues.	Oct 2025	Sarah Ward / Leigh Keeble

# ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

26 June 2025



**Subject:** SUPPORTED INTERNSHIPS

**Report of:** Executive Director of Adult & Community Based Services

**Decision Type:** Non-Key.

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where people live healthier, safe and independent lives (People).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that is welcoming with an inclusive and growing economy providing opportunities for all (Potential).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community (Organisation).</li> </ul>

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To provide the Adult & Community Based Services Committee with an update on Supported Internships, including recent success stories and future plans.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Nationally, only 4.8% of people with special educational needs and disabilities gain permanent paid employment in the UK. Despite legislation setting the pace for creating more opportunity for people with disabilities, these statistics show that more needs to be done if we are to bridge the employment gap and bring equality.
- 3.2 People with disabilities who want to and are able to work are under-recognised and under-utilised assets. Paid employment is transformational in terms of health, wellbeing, quality of life and social integration, enabling people with a learning disability to achieve financial, emotional and social

independence. Over 30 years of research has shown that employment is associated with significant health gains. An increase in the disability employment rate would also reduce the rate of relative poverty and absolute poverty among disabled people.

- 3.3 A Supported Internship is a study programme aimed at young people aged 16 to 24 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and want to move into employment but need some extra support. An internship usually lasts for a year, with the opportunity to complete three different placements.

#### 4. **SUPPORTED INTERNSHIPS IN HARTLEPOOL**

- 4.1 Adult Social Care has been working in partnership with DFN Project Search since 2023 to develop supported internships in Hartlepool. The DFN Project Search approach has an excellent success rate with up to 70% of participants going on to gain full time employment.
- 4.2 The programme involves support from:
- A Job Coach who supports with teaching tasks and skills the intern will need for job; assists with travel training and models appropriate behaviour.
  - An Instructor who delivers employability sessions and has regular meetings with interns, host business and caregivers
  - A Mentor/Supervisor who answers questions; teaches about work culture; develops rapport with interns and provides a safe space.
- 4.3 The first cohort of 5 supported interns started in January 2024 and undertook placements in a range of settings within Adult & Community Based Services teams and with employers.
- 4.4 Feedback from employers / host teams was incredibly positive:
- He's become an integral part of the team – Community Hubs
  - Everything he does is with a smile and a friendly demeanour – Voluntary Sector Organisation
  - He has been a pleasure to have in store – Heron Foods
- 4.5 Feedback from young people who participated in the programme was overwhelmingly positive. People felt they had grown in confidence, gained experience of different work environments, learned new skills and made new friends. Their comments included:
- I really enjoy coming to Project Search every day
  - it's the first time in a long time I've been in a positive headspace
  - it's the first time where I feel properly supported
  - I like the group I'm in and that we can all talk about personal issues
  - I'm really happy with my placement
- 4.6 Parents and family members were also impressed with the outcomes of the programme. The following feedback came from 'a proud mam':

My son used to stay in his room all of the time, gaming all night and sleeping most of the day. Getting involved with Project Search was the best decision he ever made. The programme has changed him completely, his confidence has grown even at home, he's not on his computer as much and is joining in with family activities and conversations. He now has a purpose in life and a reason to get up in the morning.

4.7 Following the supported internship programme:

- One intern has completed the first year of a business administration apprenticeship with HBC.
- One intern has secured part-time employment with HBC.
- One intern has secured full-time employment in the private sector and has recently purchased his dream car.
- After failing his English GCSE 5 times another intern has been supported to successfully complete his level 2 in English which is opening up his employment prospects. He is volunteering at the Fab Lab whilst looking for employment.

4.8 A second cohort of 9 interns started the programme in September 2024 and are currently undertaking placements. Two interns had such successful first placements that one is now employed as a caretaker by HBC and another is employed as a handyman in a Hartlepool care home.

4.9 A cohort of 5 supported interns aged 25+ started an adapted programme in January 2025. Since starting the programme:

- Three interns have participated in an Asda recruitment training course and two have been shortlisted for interview at a future date.
- One intern has recently completed his DBS application and will be starting as a volunteer gardener in a care home.
- One intern is keen to set up a social group and is working to establish a volunteer social group.

4.10 The importance of the mentor role within placements was demonstrated by the handyman in the care home who has been instrumental not only in supporting the intern but also recognising their potential and trusting the skill of the young person to complete the tasks required.

4.11 National Supported Internship Day on 27 March 2025 provided an opportunity to celebrate the success of the programme and the fantastic outcomes being achieved for the young people taking part. The interns shared inspirational stories and talked about their aspirations for the future. Raising the profile of supported internships has resulted in a trip to London for the current cohort of interns, where they will meet Jonathan Brash, MP to share their experiences.

4.12 The latest Intern Newsletter is attached as **Appendix 1** along with stories from some of the interns who have been supported: Kieran's Story (**Appendix 2**) and Josh's Story (**Appendix 3**).

## 5. PROPOSED NEXT STEPS



- 5.1 Funding of £20,000 to support the programme has been provided by the Department for Education (DfE) for the last two years and it has recently been confirmed that this will be provided for a further year.

The priorities for the coming year have been identified by DfE as:

- supporting and sustaining a SEND Employment Forum; and
- ongoing support for interns after they have completed the programme.

- 5.2 Securing placements with a wider range of employers is essential to the success of supported internships and there are plans in place to build links with the Hartlepool Business Forum through the Chair of Economic Growth & Regeneration. Work is also planned to engage with adult social care providers who will be required to offer volunteering opportunities and placements as part of their social value commitment.

- 5.3 A partnership with Asda is being developed which will enable a further cohort of 15 interns to be supported. Asda have similar partnerships in place in other areas which have been very successful and resulted in a high proportion of interns securing employment. It is hoped that commitment from an employer of this size will encourage others to become involved and also support the development of a SEND Employment Forum.

- 5.4 As one of the largest employers in the borough, the Council needs to demonstrate a genuine commitment to this programme and promote the benefits of supported internships for employers as well as interns. The ways in which the Council can lead this work include:
- A commitment to offering placements across all departments, informed by the interests of interns.
  - Improved links with the SEND team to ensure that supported internships are routinely considered for young people and seen as a fundamental part of the local offer. Supported internships can be funded as the final year of a young person's Education Health & Care Plan which helps the programme to be financially sustainable as well as providing meaningful opportunities for young people with additional needs.
  - Commitment from the Jobs & Skills service to provide ongoing support following the internship programme, which may include support to find employment or continued support to maintain employment.

## 6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	There are no risks associated with this report. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken for supported interns linked to specific placements.
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	The programme is supported by funding from the DfE and existing resources within adult social care.

<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	Not relevant.
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Not relevant.
<b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>	There are no child and family poverty considerations specifically associated with this report, although it is recognised that supporting more young people into employment will help to tackle poverty.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Supported internships provide opportunities for people with additional needs or disabilities to access employment.
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	The supported internship programme is supported from existing staffing resources within adult social care.
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no asset management considerations associated with this report.
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no environment, sustainability and climate change considerations associated with this report.
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	There are no formal consultation requirements. There has been a significant amount of engagement with young people with additional needs regarding their aspirations and ambitions which has informed the development of the programme.

## 7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is recommended that Adult & Community Based Services Committee notes the success that has been achieved to date in relation to supported internships and supports the further development of the programme.

## 8. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Supported Internships aim to support young people with additional needs to access paid employment, improving their health, wellbeing and life chances.

**9. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Sign Off:-

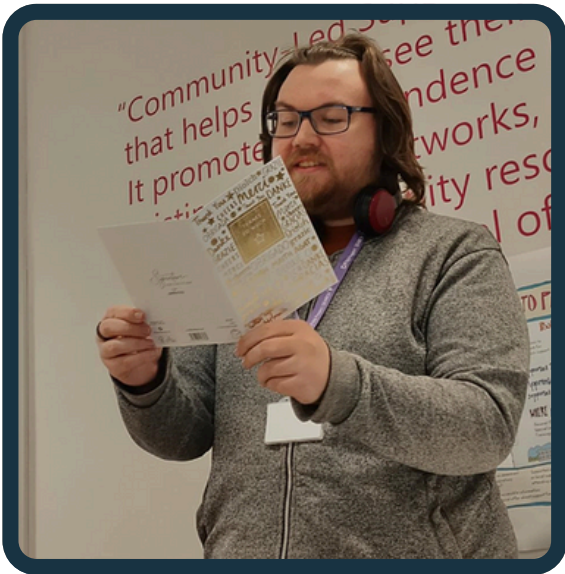
Managing Director	Date: 02/06/25
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 30/05/25
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date:

# Intern Newsletter

ISSUE 5 | March 2025

## Placement Update

### Celebrating Job Success



We're thrilled to announce that one of our previous interns has landed an exciting new role as a Project Support Officer! Their dedication, hard work, and passion have truly paid off. It's been a joy to watch their journey, and we're so proud of their achievement. This success story is a testament to their talent and commitment. Congratulations on this well-deserved milestone!

Ben's adventure at Seaton Hall Care Home is pure joy. From cracking jokes with residents to lending a helping hand, he's loving every hands-on moment. His infectious enthusiasm and heartfelt care make every day an exciting, rewarding experience for everyone involved.

Thank you to Seaton Hall!



**Ben working at Seaton Hall Care Home**

## *Interns working on Presentation skills*



This month, the interns have been honing their presentation skills, diving into the art of engaging an audience and delivering their ideas with confidence. Through practice sessions, feedback, and collaboration, they've shown remarkable improvement. Their dedication to mastering this vital skill is evident, and it's exciting to see them grow into effective communicators, ready to tackle future challenges with poise and professionalism.

## *HBC Staff Sharing career journey*

Staff members love popping into sessions to share their unique career journeys. With every twist and turn in their stories, they light up the room, inspiring everyone with their passion and perseverance. These heartfelt conversations create a sense of connection and camaraderie with the interns, sparking curiosity and ambition. It's a beautiful way to grow and learn together.





## Volunteering at Hartlepool Hospital

Michael recently joined Hartlepool Hospital as a volunteer, and he's been a breath of fresh air! Enthusiastic and eager to help, he's quickly become an invaluable part of the team. Michael's warmth and dedication shine through in every interaction, whether he's assisting patients or supporting staff. His positive energy and genuine desire to make a difference are truly inspiring.

Welcome aboard, Michael—  
Hartlepool Hospital is lucky to have you!



## Placement Opportunities

As the number of interns we have are growing, we are looking for new placement opportunities.

If this is something you could provide, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Hayley Watt.



**[hayley.watt@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:hayley.watt@hartlepool.gov.uk)**



**01429 523010**



## Kieran's Story:

My Name is Kieran and I used to be a supported intern.

Before coming onto the programme, I did 3 years in college doing bricklaying and plumbing. Which got nowhere. After college I joined the programme and I couldn't argue with it, the staff were really sound and very easy to get along with.

The programme consists of three 3-month placements. I chose caretaking as my first placement and I am very happy I did so, the staff in Central are all welcoming and easy to get along with, the caretakers I was shadowing took me in as one of their own, whilst also being mindful of my condition. And with only 3 months a job opportunity popped up as a caretaker at a different building, I didn't have a clue how to fill out council applications. But the programme staff as well as the Community Hub Co-ordinator and Caretaker all took time out of their day to help me fill out the application before the deadline.

And after only three months as an intern I got the job, fast forward to now I have a second job on a casual contract in Central Hub I used to be an intern at.

Could not be happier with the result I got out of the internship, I could not praise them and recommend them enough. Three years ago in college and I got nowhere, but three months on the internship and I've got two jobs working for the council. That alone speaks for itself.



## Josh's Story: A Journey of Growth and Achievement

Josh's journey is a powerful testament to the impact of support, determination, and opportunity. It began with the Power People and Purpose summer programme, which expanded his support network and built his confidence.

He then joined the Valuing Individuality Programme (VIP), where he developed social skills and independence. Through a supported internship, Josh gained real-world experience in various roles, including Digital Navigator and Bereavement Support Assistant, learning valuable skills and empathy.

One of his biggest challenges was achieving his English Level 2 qualification. Despite past educational setbacks, personalised support helped him build confidence and succeed. Balancing studies with volunteer work, Josh's determination paid off.

Now, as he continues to volunteer and search for employment, Josh's resilience and growth inspire everyone around him. His story shows that with the right support and determination, incredible transformations are possible.





# ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

26 June 2025



**Subject:** DIGITAL INNOVATION IN ADULT SOCIAL CARE

**Report of:** Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services

**Decision Type:** For information

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

**Hartlepool will be a place:**

- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To update Committee regarding digital innovation and new technologies being introduced to enhance adult social care services, that aim to empower staff, partners and residents of Hartlepool.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The use of technology in adult social care is not a new development but much of the focus to date has been on adopting systems to support adult social care processes. In Hartlepool this has seen the development of a range of systems including Firmstep, CareFirst, Controcc, Call Confirm, Enterprise and the ELMS system used by Tees Community Equipment Services. Ensuring staff are trained and confident in using these systems remains a priority.
- 3.2 More recently the potential of digital working in adult social care has been seen as a means of significantly improving how people are supported by enhancing the quality, efficiency and personalisation of care.
- 3.3 Research by Skills for Care found that digital technologies can help facilitate:
1. Better communication: digital tools like secure messaging apps or video calls enable worker to communicate with family members, healthcare

- professionals and other staff members more easily, ensuring better coordination and faster responses to people's needs.
2. Efficient care planning: digital systems allow care plans to be updated in real-time, ensuring that all workers have access to the most accurate information about a person's health, preferences and needs, leading to more personalised and consistent care.
  3. Remote monitoring: technologies such as wearables or smart home devices can help monitor an individual's health conditions, track vital signs and detect falls or other emergencies, allowing for timely interventions.
  4. Training and development: digital platforms provide care staff with ongoing access to training and learning resources, which helps them stay up-to-date with best practices and regulations, ultimately improving the quality of care.
  5. Record keeping and compliance: digital records reduce paperwork.
  6. Increased autonomy for people drawing on care and support: digital tools like assistive technologies and apps can empower individuals receiving care to manage certain aspects of their daily routines more independently, boosting their autonomy and quality of life.
- 3.4 Ultimately, Skills for Care found that digital working enhances both the quality of care and the working conditions of staff working in adult social care, benefitting the entire sector.
- 3.5 Advances in technology are happening at a pace and whilst we do not believe that we should be adopting technology for technology's sake, we do need to take a sensible approach to its implementation to maximise the opportunities that technology offers. We are developing an Adult Social Care Digital Strategy that will support the vision and outcomes of the adult social care strategy and complement digital developments in the council as a whole.
- 3.6 Our Digital Strategy will start from the assumption that technology can never and should never be used as a substitute for human interaction, but when used in appropriate and responsible ways it can give staff more time to interact with people.
- 3.7 Our strategy will be designed to empower staff, partners and residents, enabling individuals to live independently, resiliently and well. The strategy will be structured around three key aims: digitally enabled people, digitally enabled workforce and digitally enabled partnerships and is underpinned by a number of digital projects/developments that are taking place in the department.

#### 4. PROPOSALS / OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 The digital projects being implemented or piloted in adult social care to support digitally enabled people, a digitally enabled workforce and digitally enabled partnerships.

##### 4.2 Hartlepool Now

4.2.1 Hartlepool Now is adult social care's information, advice and guidance website designed to support the requirements of the Care Act 2014 and meet the needs of the local community.

4.2.2 Users are able to create an account and save information and guidance, personalised to their individual needs. Organisations have their own account to add their information, activities and events, ensuring it is kept up to date.

4.2.3 Hartlepool Now as a resource has grown over the years and increasingly residents of the town and the voluntary and community sector see the site as the "go to" place for support information and events, groups and activities in the town.

##### 4.3 All Together Now

4.3.1 During the Covid-19 pandemic we continued to communicate with our most vulnerable residents and offered a range of online activities they could access. Although this worked for a short period of time using the digital tools available, we recognised the need to explore further and make this offer sustainable.

4.3.2 Using Hartlepool Now as our base, we wanted to take our developments a step further and develop a virtual community hub – All Together Now (<https://alltogethernow.hartlepoolnow.co.uk>). The idea was to create a virtual space that replicates all the events and activities that take place in the Hub buildings, but in a digital environment. The platform allows 'live' and pre-recorded videos. People can join sessions on a fixed date and time or join an open chat environment.

4.3.3 The platform is still being developed and is being tested by residents with the support of the digital navigators.

##### 4.4 Mobilise

4.4.1 Mobilise was commissioned regionally by the North East Association of Directors of Adult Social Care (ADASS) and funded from the Accelerating Reform Fund which was launched by the Department of Health and Social Care to boost the quality and accessibility of adult social care by supporting innovation and scaling. The fund aims to address barriers to adopting innovative practices and build capacity and capability in adult social care including supporting unpaid carers.

- 4.4.2 Mobilise is an online platform that supports unpaid carers and includes free support calls and coaching programmes with their carer support team. The aim of Mobilise is not to replace existing local carers organisations but to enhance them by providing services outside of normal operating hours and reaching those carers who would not necessarily engage with a physical service.
- 4.4.3 Mobilise launched in Hartlepool in April 2024 and, during the first year of operation, engaged with 919 unpaid carers, 411 of who have accessed some sort of direct support including: e-support subscriptions where a carer subscribes to receive weekly email newsletters that include new information to support carers and links to local support; peer support networks that provide emotional and practical support and peer to peer connections; and a carers allowance checking tool.
- 4.4.4 Of the Hartlepool residents who have accessed Mobilise 78% had not previously accessed support. The majority of access was outside of working hours (53%) with 21% using the service before 7am and after 7pm and 27% of interactions taking place at the weekend.
- 4.4.5 The regional contract for Mobilise is in place until April 2026. Further work will be undertaken over the next six months to explore options to maintain this form of support in Hartlepool when the regional funding comes to an end.

#### 4.5 Togetherall

- 4.5.1 The Togetherall platform is a digital mental health support tool that provides a safe and anonymous online community for individuals seeking support for their mental wellbeing. It offers 24/7 communication and emotional support monitored by trained clinicians, allowing people to express themselves, access resources and engage in peer support. Togetherall aims to help people take control of their mental health while connecting with others who share similar experiences.
- 4.5.2 The platform is monitored 24/7/365 by accredited mental health clinicians' who people can access if necessary. A person can either ask directly to speak to a clinician or algorithms can pick up any words associated with a mental health crisis. This then takes a person out of the public platform direct to a clinician who will provide 1:1 support. In most cases Togetherall trained clinicians have de-escalated crisis, however via the risk escalation processes established on set-up, clinicians have details of local services including the local crisis team, Lets Connect, Impact and START and will alert the most relevant service to offer continued support for the person.
- 4.5.3 The sophisticated technology embedded in Togetherall allows the clinician to access a person's location and if needed, they can trigger an ambulance or police response to support the person. To date there has been 11 people where the risk escalation process has been activated to ensure people receive crisis support.

- 4.5.4 Since its launch in Hartlepool in April 2023, around 500 people have accessed the site with 66% of members joining because they were experiencing depression and low mood. The site has reached people who have not accessed support before with 21% saying they had no other form of support outside Togetherall (including family or friends). This service is safe, anonymous and free to all in Hartlepool (aged 16+).
- 4.5.5 Feedback from people who have accessed the platform has been extremely positive – one person has summed up their experience “As soon as I joined, I felt part of a supportive environment”.

#### 4.6 Entitled To

- 4.6.1 Entitled To is a benefit calculator where people can find out which benefits they might be eligible to claim. The calculator can be self-serve or advisor led so staff can create and save accounts to support people to check their entitlement and where applicable, link direct to benefit applications.
- 4.6.2 The site is updated annually and includes local council tax information. All benefit changes are updated on the site as required.
- 4.6.3 As part of our contract with the providers of Entitled To, in addition to our staff having licences, we have been able to provide representatives from the voluntary and community sector with licences to help them support people to maximise their benefits.
- 4.6.4 To date, there have been 275 completed calculations for people from Hartlepool and £43,778.45 of weekly total benefits identified (these might be claimed, unclaimed or partially claimed).

#### 4.7 Artificial Intelligence

- 4.7.1 The benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) in care are far reaching, offering incredible opportunities to help improve care delivery and efficiency. But social care isn't just about software or processes; it's about people so it is important that we work to ensure that we establish the right balance between AI and human connection; protecting the fundamental principles of social care whilst harnessing the benefits AI has to offer.
- 4.7.2 There are two people-focused AI projects being piloted in adult social care both being developed with This is Focus, our provider for Hartlepool Now.
- 4.7.3 The first project is exploring the use of AI to modernise and improve the experience of using the Equipment Finder on Hartlepool Now. The second is an innovation project funded from the Accelerating Reform Funding exploring how AI can enhance access to and understanding of adult social care information, advice and guidance (IAG) on [www.hartlepoolnow.co.uk](http://www.hartlepoolnow.co.uk). This is not just about making existing content 'easy read', it is about fundamentally changing the way the search function works creating a totally bespoke response to meet an individual's requirements.

- 4.7.4 Adult social care is a complex system and for people accessing that system, its navigation is complicated meaning many people don't actually know the question they want to answer or issue they need support with.
- 4.7.5 Adult social care has traditionally provided IAG via public information and directory type websites. In Hartlepool we have tried to enhance our IAG offer on Hartlepool Now and developed an app, but because of the way information on websites is structured, the IAG has to be categorised to allow for searching. The content is very text based and, with many residents in the borough having low literacy levels, will inevitably be inaccessible for a significant proportion of the population
- 4.7.6 A website expects you to have a certain amount of knowledge about what you are looking for and the skill to navigate that content. AI has the potential to remove the requirement for that knowledge and skill by its ability to access an unimaginable wealth of information.
- 4.7.7 One of the strengths of AI is the ability to spot patterns: it can identify other factors in an individuals' circumstances and provide support and advice on those, even though initially the person was asking about something else. AI can spot the things that people aren't aware of themselves.
- 4.7.8 As an example, in a recent focus group to test the potential of AI linked to the equipment finder, a lady inputted into the Chatbot that she was feeling a bit unsteady on her feet and worried about falling. The response suggested that she might want to think about having some grab rails fitted in her home and having telecare installed but then went on to suggest that she consider joining the Steady Feet programme which takes place every Wednesday around the corner from where she lives.
- 4.7.9 It is this type of technology that we are hoping will help remove the need for people to know what they need to search for so that people can find the relevant information and advice for them independent of the 'way' in which they ask a question.
- 4.7.10 AI can potentially be a more empathetic, conversational and engaging way for people to obtain information and advice (and find equipment that helps them stay safe at home), resulting in an improved experience so that people will return and use the service again and promote its usefulness.
- 4.8 Online Financial Assessments
- 4.8.1 We are working with Oxford Computer Consultants (OCC), the provider of our adult social care finance system, to develop an online financial assessment tool with the aim of starting a test phase by October 2025.
- 4.8.2 A financial assessment works out if a person must pay a contribution towards their adult social care support. The assessment is a complex process based on an individual's income, spending and capital.

4.8.3 An Online Financial Assessment will provide people with the option to input their financial information and calculate an indicative contribution amount. This will empower individuals to decide how they want to proceed with potential services and support their financial planning.

4.8.4 Alongside online financial assessment, an automated process is being developed to provide individuals with up-to-date statements of accounts, detailing the care received and payments made. This system aims to streamline processes and provide transparency regarding care balances.

#### 4.9 Signapse and Sign Video

4.9.1 Making our information more accessible is a key focus of our work. We are currently exploring how we can integrate Signapse, a real-time generative AI sign language translation software which is designed to break down communication barriers instantly, into Hartlepool Now. This will improve access to IAG for people from the deaf community and will be made available following the development of the chatbot functionality.

4.9.2 The council has recently signed up for Sign Video – this means that deaf people ringing the council or coming into council buildings such as the Community Hubs will be able to communicate via a BSL translator video link. For phone calls, they will have a number to call or scan a QR code which will take them to the translator – they will then find out what the issue/query is and will contact that department or service and then carry out the call with someone with the BSL interpreter acting as a go-between for the deaf person and the council. If it is a face-to-face meeting, the deaf person will just use their own device or one of ours to connect to the translator to then have a conversation.

4.9.3 Sign Video will be launched as part of the new Council website which is expected to go live in July 2025.

#### 4.10 Improved Systems and Processes

The adoption of systems to support and improve processes is well embedded in adult social care and current systems will continue to be developed with staff trained to make best use of them to ensure effective, streamlined processes that enhance service delivery. These have included:

- The Great Care North Record that allows integration and sharing of information across health and social care.
- The Optica tool supporting hospital discharge processes by sharing information locally.
- Power BI which allows for dynamic information analysis
- The Virtual House training tool that educates staff on assistive technology.
- The practice manual where national legislation (with automatic updates) and local policies and procedures are stored for easy access from CareFirst

Whilst supporting the social care workforce, the Great Care North Record and Optica tool are also beneficial to partners ensuring timely sharing of information.

#### 4.11 Magic Notes

- 4.11.1 Magic Notes is a tool developed by Beam, a welfare services technology company, to support frontline staff manage their administration. As part of its development, the tool was successfully piloted with social workers in 28 local authorities with the tool reducing the amount of time workers spent on administrative tasks by an average of more than 12 hours per week.
- 4.11.2 Magic Notes generates instant, customised assessments. It records a conversation, transcribes it and then creates a document based on a template designed to meet a specific need such as a Care Act Assessment.
- 4.11.3 The technology involved is based on a 'human in the loop' model, with human social workers being required to review the AI-generated documents before submitting them. Social workers can make changes manually, with an option to use AI to speed up the editing process. The documents produced by the tool were generated speedily and accurately. They can be edited, translated and adjusted by reading age which improves accessibility.
- 4.11.4 Where the tool has been piloted there have been very positive outcomes. Staff have been overwhelmingly positive about using the tool, regardless of their confidence in technology and were particularly positive about how using the tool had allowed them to spend more face-to-face time with people.
- 4.11.5 A 6 week pilot in Hartlepool Adult Social Care was agreed by the Executive Leadership Team and commenced on 14 April. A pilot group of 30 social care workers have tested 4 templates: general meeting notes, a concise case note, Care Act assessment and support plan. An evaluation will be completed at the end of the pilot and early feedback is very positive.

#### 4.12 Triple Value Impact (TVI)

- 4.12.1 As part of the council-wide Transformation Programme, work is underway with Triple Value Impact (TVI) to identify further opportunities for digital solutions to support processes/services within adult social care.
- 4.12.2 In Adult Social Care, four service areas are being explored:
- Pre-empting demand for adults services
  - Reducing domiciliary care supply issues through digitally involving the community in care
  - In home technology – 24/7 monitoring of people's wellbeing
  - Financial Assessment automation using Open Banking
- 4.12.3 The goals of this work have been developed with the departmental management team and potential technology providers have demonstrated



some of the options available, which will inform the development of business cases for consideration.

- 4.13 A presentation accompanying this report will demonstrate the technologies that are in place or being developed.

## 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	There are no risks associated with this report.
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<p>Funding has been secured from the NE ADASS Innovation Fund to develop and pilot a number of digital developments.</p> <p>Financial considerations for further developments and implementation of solutions will be considered as part of the business cases.</p>
<b>SUBSIDY CONTROL</b>	Not applicable.
<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Any digital solutions will be procured in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
<b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>	No child and family poverty considerations have been identified associated with this report
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<p>There are no equality and diversity implications specifically associated with this report, however the introduction of AI is seen as a positive tool to improve accessibility with its ability to translate and create easy read versions of documents.</p> <p>Digital Navigators are employed in the Support Hub who can support people in the community with equipment, data and the skills to maximise digital technology, helping to remove barriers and reduce digital exclusion.</p>
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<p>There are no staffing considerations specifically associated with this report. Feedback from other authorities has indicated the positive impact on staff wellbeing of tools such as Magic Notes.</p> <p>It is possible that there will be staffing considerations in the future if digital technologies are successful in terms of improving efficiency. As an example, adopting remote technologies can reduce the need for domiciliary care staff with a</p>

	<p>greater emphasis on remote monitoring. This would potentially reduce some of the recruitment challenges experienced by commissioned providers.</p> <p>Any staffing implications would need to be explored further and considered as part of business cases to support further investment.</p>
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	There are no asset management considerations associated with this report.
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Not applicable.
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	Internal consultation has been undertaken with staff through seminars and workshops. Public engagement and consultation will be undertaken through user forums/focus groups as required.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that Adult & Community Based Services Committee notes the report and supports the developments of digital working in adult social care.

## 7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The potential of digital working in adult social care is being seen as a means of significantly improving how people are supported by enhancing the quality, efficiency and personalisation of care. Exploring how we can make better use of digital working is important for the future development of adult social care.

## 8. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 02/06/25
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 30/05/25
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date:

# ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

26 June 2025



**Subject:** ALLOTMENT STRATEGY

**Report of:** Assistant Director (Preventative and Community Based Services)

**Decision Type:** This report is for information only

## 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
- where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)
- that is connected, sustainable, clean and green. (Place)
- a place with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community. (Organisation)

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Allotment Strategy and the proposed investment in sites in the coming months.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At a meeting of this Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023 the Allotment Strategy 2023 – 2026, was agreed. The overall aim of the Strategy focuses on the needs of the current user group and wider community that the allotments serve. It proposed evolving service operations, encouraging a wider demographic to access allotments within the Borough and making the service more customer focused.
- 3.2 Work continues on the implementation of this strategy and alongside this a programme of capital spending. An update on the strategy was presented to this Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024, alongside a review of the service.

#### 4. PROPOSALS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 Since the last update, further work has been completed to address the issues raised in the action plan, to deliver the strategy. The progress that has been made is outlined in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 Alongside the delivery of the strategy, there was a capital allocation of £149,000 to address issues on sites across the borough. The proposals have continued to be reviewed to ensure works reflect the requirements of tenants based on feedback provided during consultations and opportunities arising from changing working practices; for example the chance to work with the Probation Service. A total of £92,129 has been invested so far and £56,871 budget remains from the capital allocation. It is proposed that this will continue to be used in order to deliver enhancements on sites. These have been developed after consultation with site users and are outlined in **Appendix 2**.
- 4.3 An independent review of the service was completed in 2024. This made a number of recommendations including a focus on streamlining practices with more digital communications and efficient management of the waiting lists. Officers carried out consultation with tenants in October of that year and used the opportunity to discuss the proposals. Since this time officers have looked at existing systems and how these can be used to address the recommendations raised. Changes in working practices have included,
- Extending tenancy agreements to 5 years to reduce annual paperwork.
  - Providing on-line forms to collect information, rather than paper, for example, animal registration and hazards forms, these can be completed by tenants or over the telephone with the support of the Customer Services Team.
  - Rule Books are no longer printed and sent to new tenants unless requested.
  - All correspondence is now sent via email where possible.

#### 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

<b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>	There is a continued need to invest in allotment sites to ensure that these are safe, secure and provide adequate facilities for tenants.
<b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<p>The Allotment Strategy is being delivered within the existing budget. The next increase to this will be implemented in March 2026, when rent will increase by 10%.</p> <p>The additional works that are proposed in order to deliver the aims of the strategy will be supported by capital funding. These are outlined in <b>Appendix 2</b>.</p>

<b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	None.
<b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>	Allotments provide benefits through increasing access to a healthy diet (fresh fruit and vegetables), physical activity, engagement with the natural environment and social interaction, all of which have proven benefits to health and wellbeing. Consultation on the Strategy provided a chance for wider engagement with the community which is reflected in the final document with pathways to increase access to allotment sites.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b>	The consultation completed during the development of the strategy provided information on the demographic of allotment holders and their specific needs and requirements. This was reflected in the strategy to ensure that as sites evolve they offer varying routes for access and wider inclusion.
<b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>	The Allotment Strategy and capital works are delivered by existing staff.
<b>ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Allotments are an important Council asset comprising 38 hectares (94 acres) of public land within the Borough. The service continues to manage the land in the most appropriate, cost effective way.
<b>ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	Allotments contribute to the biodiversity of the area they are located in and can also provide vital habitats for many species. Further to this there are opportunities for tenants to contribute to supporting the environment for example through composting on their plots, using water-butts to reduce the need for mains water, and providing seasonal fruit and vegetables reducing reliance on supermarket produce which can have a wider carbon footprint.
<b>CONSULTATION</b>	Prior to the development of the strategy consultation was carried out. This has continued with meetings held with Associations in October 2024 to discuss rents and, more broadly, changing working practices. Further to this officers regularly communicate with tenants via a newsletter and meetings with Association chairs.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the progress made on :

- delivering the Allotment Strategy as outlined in **Appendix 1**; and

- delivering the agreed programme of capital works as outlined in **Appendix 2**.

## 7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The delivery of the Allotment Strategy guides service delivery, ensuring that work is meeting the needs of tenants and the wider community.
- 7.2 The works outlined in the programme of capital works have been tailored to address the concerns raised by tenants and associations, along with officer's observations of opportunities to enhance sites.

## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024  
Allotment Rent Consultation

Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
Allotment Strategy

Council, Council Motion (Item 12), 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022  
Allotment Strategy, Update on Consultation

Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021, Allotment  
Communication Strategy

Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021, Allotment  
Review Update

## 9. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date:
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Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 11/06/25
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 10/06/25



**Appendix 1 - Actions completed towards delivery of Strategy**

<b>Aim 1 – Site Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Palisade fencing to part of the Thornhill boundary improving security to the site.</li> <li>- New fencing where required to allotments on the main footpath at Station Lane.</li> <li>- New car park surface at Nicholson Field and locked gates at Speeding Drive to deter fly tipping.</li> <li>- Height barrier repair to ensure use at Stranton and prevent access by high vehicles.</li> <li>- Security reminders published in newsletter and on Facebook regularly.</li> <li>- Any repairs to locks made as soon as possible.</li> <li>- Tenants encouraged to report all crime to police no matter how small.</li> </ul>
<b>Aim 2- Vacant Plots and Invasive Weeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Programme of Japanese knotweed treatment ongoing.</li> <li>- 3 vacant plots at Nicholson Field and 7 at Stranton brought back into use.</li> <li>- 5 vacant overgrown plots cut back and tidied by Probation Team and re-let.</li> <li>- Planned ongoing clearance by the Probation Team to assist in letting difficult to let plots which are overgrown, accompanied viewings with prospective tenants, and Project Officer to engage and encourage prospective tenants.</li> <li>- Customers encouraged via newsletter to contact HBC if they know of any plots not being worked so action can be taken. (also linking into Aim 3)</li> <li>- Target of fortnightly offer runs to keep vacant plots to a minimum and exploring new ways of letting plots which have proved hard to let, for example through referrals from current tenants, attendance at events with special offers and special offers to the whole of the waiting list for every site.</li> </ul>
<b>Aim 3 – Fly tipping and Environmental offences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clearing G27-33 Stranton has removed contaminating plastics and rubbish.</li> <li>- A large longstanding fly tip was taken from Nicholson Field before the car park works. In addition, rubbish has been cleared from plots on this site.</li> <li>- Fly tipping at Station Lane car park removed.</li> <li>- Probation litter picked lanes as part of work at sites, and these schemes will be used to maintain the lanes instead of spraying costly chemicals.</li> <li>- A change of waste contractor has resulted in more efficient disposal of rubbish with anything that can be recycled on site or burned left on site. Having a team that guide the waste removal, rather than skips that can be filled with any rubbish available, has both environmental and cost benefits.</li> <li>- Burning period has been extended so that it only excludes August, to allow tenants more opportunities to dispose of waste on their own plot.</li> </ul>
<b>Aim 4 – Wear and tear including general repairs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- £26,386 spent on general repairs in 2024/5 and £18,493 on water leaks and taps.</li> <li>- Officers in the team assess sites for repairs as part of regular site visits.</li> </ul>
<b>Aim 5 - Drainage including flooding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stranton 'flooded plots' G27-33 cleared and advice offered to new tenants on working these through accompanied viewing with Project Officer, prior to acceptance.</li> <li>- Articles offering advice around gardening a waterlogged garden etc. added to Facebook and newsletters.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The offering of raised beds is proving more difficult to achieve due to the cost involved therefore alternative solutions are being considered.</li> </ul>
<b>Aim 6 – Community plots and trial plots</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating community plots or trial gardens has proved difficult due to funding and the nature of these gardens requiring a lot of officer time to manage. Alternative methods of group gardening are being trialled, and two groups of gardeners have taken plots side by side on Burn Valley; Wellness Walks and a foster carers group.</li> <li>- St Hild's School have taken a plot on Nicholson Field. Jesmond Road school and West View nursery are in the process of signing up to take a plot each.</li> <li>- Officers are represented on the Food Partnership and participation where appropriate</li> <li>- Plots at Stranton brought back into use will be split in half, introducing more smaller plots and increased choice.</li> </ul>
<b>Aim 7 – Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Newsletter was circulated in July, October and December 2024, and February and May 2025. New layout and design implemented to make it more engaging.</li> <li>- Facebook account is being used more to inform customers.</li> <li>- Attendance planned at Men's Meet up in June to promote the allotment service to groups and individuals.</li> <li>- Regular meetups held with associations on site.</li> </ul>
<b>Plans for 2025/26:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remaining capital budget will be invested to further improve sites.</li> <li>- Accompanied viewings to be carried out to engage tenants and discuss tenancy and options on vacant plots.</li> <li>- Team will make more opportunities to be visible and available to customers.</li> <li>- Continue to use Probation Service to clear overgrown plots and litter pick.</li> <li>- Further 'do not let' plots identified to be cleared/re-let.</li> <li>- Large plots may be split to create smaller, more manageable plots and choice.</li> <li>- Newsletter overhaul to include bespoke items and achieve regular circulation.</li> <li>- Investigate external funding options for HBC and tenants.</li> <li>- Aligning the Allotment Team with other Council Services through HBC Online.</li> <li>- Digital tenancy agreements to continue to be implemented.</li> <li>- Tenants signing up to new tenancies are invited to meet officers for a brief 'sign up meeting' where they will sign the tenancy agreement, receive information regarding inspections etc and be able to ask questions.</li> <li>- Probation inspections carried out at months 1, 2 &amp; 3; if no action has been taken on plot at month 1 or 2 the Support Officer will call the tenant to discuss.</li> <li>- Targets added to processes to improve response times and customer experience.</li> </ul>

Appendix 2 - Capital Investment to date

Site	Works	Before and after	Investment
Thornhill	Security fencing installed	<p><b>Fence Before:</b></p>  <p><b>Fence After:</b></p> 	£17,000

<p>Nicholson Field</p>	<p>Car park and lanes improved</p>	<p><b>Before works:</b></p> <div data-bbox="636 256 1767 541">  </div> <p><b>After photos of car park:</b></p> <div data-bbox="636 635 1695 1034">  </div>	<p>£31,000</p>
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<p>Nicholson Field</p>	<p>Vacant allotments brought back into use</p>	<div data-bbox="636 261 1211 699">  <p>Nicholson Field B93</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1211 261 1805 699">  <p>Nicholson Field B93</p> </div> <div data-bbox="636 799 1162 1198">  </div> <div data-bbox="1184 791 1724 1198">  </div>	<p>£2,500</p>
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Station Lane	Fencing improvements	<p><b>Before photos:</b></p> <div data-bbox="636 256 1016 544"> <p>Station Lane A20</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1016 256 1397 544"> <p>Station Lane A19</p>  </div> <div data-bbox="1397 256 1778 544"> <p>Station Lane A17</p>  </div> <p><b>After Photos:</b></p> <div data-bbox="636 708 1218 1155">  </div> <div data-bbox="1218 708 1800 1155">  </div>	£16,340
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Rossmere	Lane improvements	<p><b>Before photos:</b></p>  <p><b>After photos:</b></p> 	£6,637
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Stranton	Vacant allotments brought back into use	<p>Before photos of G27-33</p>  <p>After photos of G27-33</p> 	£20,500
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Burn Valley	Lane improvements	<p><b>Before photos:</b></p>  <p><b>After photos:</b></p> 	£3,600
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Total capital spend to date, £97,577

## Appendix 2 Proposed Capital Works 2026/27

Site	Project	Estimated Cost
All sites	Install backflow protection to all stand pipes and upgrade them to double taps where possible. This will protect and future proof infrastructure.	£1,000
Rossmere	Improve security with new external fence to front of site	£10,000
Nicholson Field	Improve security with alteration to entrance gates to Dowson Road, including a personnel gate to encourage walking onto site rather than driving vehicles on.	£5,000
Thornhill	Improve security with new external fencing – this would be an addition to previous fence installed in 2023.	£20,000
Thompson Grove	Improve security with new entrance gates.	£4,000
Chester Road	Review vacant allotments, clear spaces and install infrastructure to bring plots back into use.	£7,000
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£47,000</b>