

CEO Report to AGM 2026

It's hard to believe that another year has flown by and I'm delighted to still be here, definitely older but hopefully also a little wiser. 2025 brought us some unexpected challenges but it is true that adversity makes us stronger, as well as teaching us much about ourselves and those close to us. So, as usual I would like to take a few minutes to give some thanks:

Firstly, to my team. It is a joy to work with such exceptional individuals; it feels like we have each come together to complete a jigsaw and I am grateful to you all for your commitment, inspiration and care.

Thank you also to our Board who bring a wide range of expertise, giving their time, free of charge, to both challenge and support me in my role.

Our Internal Audit Team are also dedicated volunteers, ensuring that we are compliant and acting in the best interests of our membership. My thanks to you for your diligence and support.

My biggest thanks, as always, goes to our members without whom Darlington Credit Union would not exist. Making the decision to host our AGM this year solely online was not taken lightly, and I'm delighted that it's enabled so many of you to join us.

Our focus in 2025 was ensuring that we have a range of products and services that appeal to a wider demographic. We launched our Fixed Term Deposit account to appeal to those looking for a return on their investment and relaunched our Save To Win account with a broader range of monthly prizes. For our borrowers, we designed our Savers Privilege loan to reward member loyalty. This year we are turning our attention to our Junior Savers who have been a little neglected since COVID intervened with our school collection points. We are hoping to encourage a new generation of members to hop aboard for a lifelong journey with Darlington Credit Union.

Our technology continues to evolve, and we are investing in our operating systems to further streamline processes and enhance our member experience. We recognise and respect the individuality of our member's needs, and while most prefer to transact and communicate via our online channels, our branch is still a well-used hub and provides a vital lifeline to many. Technology is our second largest expense behind salaries, and this juxtaposition tells of our resolve to be 'digital when you want it and human when you need it'.

While we are very grateful for the work the unseen tech bots do for us, working 24 hours a day for a very low salary, we still believe that humans offer infinitely better insight, judgement, and communication. These irreplaceable traits build a genuine understanding of our members and are central to our continued success.

Matthew spoke of the current economic climate and the pressure this places on already squeezed household budgets, inevitably affecting some members ability to repay their loans. With our focus on supporting our borrowers on the path to financial resilience, we have revised our Credit Control messaging to great effect. We work with the borrower and encourage open conversation to reach a mutually agreed repayment plan, ensuring that despite current difficulties, the door to future borrowing remains open.

I view 2026 as a year of consolidation and growth. We are engaging with a wider audience than ever thanks to our digital marketing and local sponsorships. Our new signage was designed to clearly advertise our services and we have seen some promising signs that we are breaking down the common misconceptions of what a Credit Union is and who we serve. With your help, word of

mouth can accelerate this. We believe that everyone has the right to know of, and access, ethical and responsible financial services. No matter how tough times are, everyone should have the opportunity to dream, and the hope that their dreams can become reality. That is the Credit Union difference.