

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Health and Housing Portfolio were as follows: -

Public Health

2. The Public Health team has received confirmation of the local stop smoking services and support grant allocation for 2024 to 2025. The conditions attached to the additional funding require that the grant is ringfenced and used to:
 - (a) Invest in enhancing local authority commissioned stop smoking services and support, in addition to and while maintaining existing spend on these services and support from the public health grant.
 - (b) Build capacity to deliver expanded local stop smoking services and support.
 - (c) Build demand for local stop smoking services and support.
 - (d) Deliver increases in the number of people setting a quit date and 4 week quit outcomes.
3. The Council has been successful in its bid to the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities for funding to implement the 'swap to stop' scheme. The funding will be used to support quit attempts amongst people over the age of 18 years, who will be able to access free vapes as part of their quit attempt, as well as receive individualised targeted support from our Stop Smoking Service.
4. The Public Health team have received confirmation of the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment & Recovery Grant (SSMTR Grant) allocation for 2024-2025, which represents the third year of grant funding from the Department of Health & Social Care revenue funding allocated in the 21/22 Spending Review Settlement. The funding is managed by the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) and is provided pursuant to section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 to support delivery against the national Drug Strategy 'From Harm to Hope'.
5. Darlington's local action plan has been developed and agreed with OHID and will contribute to each of the expected national targets and outcomes set out in the Drug Strategy. Detail within the plan includes: -
 - (a) Establishing a joint process for reviewing both non-fatal overdoses and drug/alcohol related deaths; this will also inform the offer of enhanced support to the most vulnerable and at-risk individuals.

- (b) Development of effective pathways into and out of treatment services, particularly for those using opiates and/or crack.
 - (c) Expanding the availability of Naloxone across Darlington.
 - (d) Developing a range of increased rehabilitation opportunities including greater numbers accessing Residential Rehabilitation.
 - (e) Ensuring adequate capacity within the treatment system to ensure caseloads remain manageable and workers have capacity to effectively support people.
 - (f) Developing a comprehensive Recovery Offer.
 - (g) Developing a comprehensive young person's offer.
 - (h) Ensuring the input from lived experience at every stage, including peer led interventions.
6. With support from the Association of Directors of Public Health North East and sustainable food partnerships, the North East has been selected to be the regional partner for Good Food Local over the next three years. Good Food Local is a project run by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, with funding from Impact on Urban Health. The project includes a regional benchmarking programme to encourage local authorities to make commitments to good food. The submission on behalf of Darlington Borough council was made on 28th March 2024.
7. The Health and Care Act 2022 provides powers for the Secretary of State to introduce, vary and terminate community water fluoridation schemes. As set out in the national plan for NHS dentistry services in England there is a long-term ambition to systemically bring water fluoridation to more of the country and a consultation on expanding community water fluoridation schemes across the Northeast of England was announced by government on 25th March, with the consultation period closing at 11:59pm on 17th June 2024. Further information is available [here](#).

Health and Wellbeing Board

8. A series of thematic workshops have been planned to support the further development of the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy and Plan. The agreed framework of the Strategy is:
- (a) Children and Young People: Best Start in Life
 - (b) Staying Healthy and Living well
 - (c) Healthy Places
 - (d) Healthy Ways of Working
9. The thematic workshops will provide an opportunity for members of the Health and Wellbeing Board and partners to further develop the detail of the plan and agree key priorities and actions, informed by local need.

Housing Services

Universal Credit

10. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has now commenced the managed migration of Housing Benefit to Universal Credit, which will affect approximately 700 of our Council tenants.
11. Since Universal Credit was introduced, people have been naturally moving over from legacy benefits, including Housing Benefit paid by the Council, when they have a change in their circumstances, such as starting or ending work. However, as we now enter the final phase of this process, any working aged people still claiming Housing Benefit will be moved to Universal Credit during 2024-25. These will be people who have not had any changes in their circumstances, including those with disabilities and long-term medical conditions.
12. The DWP will initially write to everyone affected, inviting an on-line claim for Universal Credit. Detailed guidance and additional funding has been provided to the Council to help support affected residents with this process.
13. Our Housing Services Tenancy Sustainment Team are well prepared for the managed migration process and will be running some roadshows with the DWP during 2024-25 to raise awareness of the change with our tenants. Individual support will also be provided to those tenants who need additional help with applying for Universal Credit and the team will ensure that no-one loses any financial support with help for paying their rent.

Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

14. I am delighted that Housing Services, in partnership with Humankind charity, has successfully bid for £770,000 of Government funding from the SHAP programme, which aims to create additional housing for young adults aged 18 to 24, who are at risk of homelessness.
15. The SHAP funding will enable the purchase and refurbishment of twelve one-bedroom self-contained flats, close to the town centre. Humankind will also deliver Housing Related Support to the people in the flats, helping them gain the skills to manage and sustain tenancies and provide opportunities for move on to permanent homes. This is exactly the kind of partnership working we want to develop further, to support homelessness prevention.

Electrical Safety

16. I am extremely pleased that our Housing Services Building Maintenance Team were recently shortlisted as finalists for the Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals (ASCP) awards for 2024, under the category of Electrical Contractor of the Year.
17. The nomination recognised the work our Housing Services team had undertaken over the past year to improve electrical safety compliance in our Council homes. This included improvements to our IT systems, recruiting additional resources, improvements to our internal processes to ensure electrical safety checks are booked in with our tenants at the

earliest opportunity, and improving communications with our tenants through social media to raise awareness of the importance of electrical safety in their homes.

Lifeline Services

18. During 2023-24, our Lifeline Services team answered 10,264 emergency calls, from the 3,528 elderly and vulnerable residents who rely on this service to live independently in their homes. Of those calls, 553 required emergency services to attend; all other calls were resolved by Lifeline.
19. In relation to the digital upgrade process, 3 of our sheltered schemes were upgraded to digital equipment in 2023-24, affecting 129 residents. 75% of all equipment has now been switched over to digital, leaving the remaining 25% to be completed in 2024-25.

Rent Collection

20. During 2023-24, our Housing Services Income Team collected over £27.9m in rent and service charges, which was an increase of 6.7% from the previous year. The team worked exceptionally hard to engage with customers, often collaboratively with tenancy management, Adult Social Care and external support agencies. This has ensured early intervention and as a result, the number of evictions carried out due to rent arrears has reduced from 15 in 2022-23 to 11 in 2023-24.
21. In addition, our Tenancy Sustainment Team secured over £48,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments for our tenants in 2023-24, which is used to top-up payments of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. Additionally, they also applied through the Northumbrian Water Social Tariff Scheme on behalf of those tenants on a low income and secured over £267,000 in funding.

Dolphin Centre

22. I am delighted that the Council has been awarded just over half a million pounds from Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund to undertake energy saving improvements. New plant machinery and solar energy panels will help improve the Dolphin Centre's carbon footprint and reduce costs.
23. The reopening of the main pool has seen a rise in memberships in line with the highest recorded levels in the centre's history, with over 2,200 current members. This follows the record-breaking levels reported in the previous half-term holiday period, across all holiday activities.
24. The water education programme is successfully sitting at 87% capacity full. The last 12 months have seen a real commitment from the centre in maintaining water education throughout the pool closure, ensuring the closure did not impact children's water education.

Eastbourne Sports Complex Capital Project

25. Eastbourne Sports Complex capital project is nearing completion. The UK TrackMark standard athletics track, and additional stadia artificial grass pitch opened in September

2023 as part of a phased opening programme, with new changing facilities provided in May 2024. The new artificial grass pitch is undergoing a stadium accreditation inspection which will allow teams to be able to play up to step 5 on the national league pyramid. The new investment has seen an additional 50,000 visits since September 2023. The official opening took place on Tuesday 7 May 2024 and all Members were invited to attend the event.

Key Meetings

26. Cllr Harker, Cllr Layton and I have met with the North East Ambulance Service and Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust, in order to bolster our partnership working with the NHS. We heard from Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust about their continued improvement journey. We took actions away, such as connecting our climate change officers with the North East Ambulance Service to share learning and information regarding more environmentally friendly vehicles.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing