

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council the main areas of work undertaken under the Stronger Communities Portfolio are as follows:

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

2. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends – Darlington:

Darlington	YTD March 2023	YTD March 2024	% increase/decrease
Crime	11632	12048	+4%
ASB	2509	2244	-11%

3. The crime increase equates to 416 offences, with vehicle crime, theft, theft of pedal cycle and shoplifting showing increases. The Police, together with partners have responded to the increase through crime prevention campaigns, dedicated and additional patrol, proactive operations and targeting suspects which has resulted in a significant number of arrests.
4. ASB has reduced by 265 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, good partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.
5. Areas showing a current increase in ASB include Cockerton East and Haughton North. Partners have increased patrols in these areas, targeted offenders and identified several individuals who are now subject of further investigation and intervention by the relevant services.
6. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends - Darlington Town Centre

Darlington Town Centre	YTD March 2023	YTD March 2024	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1441	1496	+3.8%
ASB	216	188	-13%

7. Shoplifting, theft and damage account for a significant amount of town centre crime. Shopwatch was re-launched on 18 October 2023 and participation continues to grow with over 150 members involved in the crime reduction initiative.
8. The Police have issued crime prevention guidance to retailers that has helped to target, arrest and remand offenders.

9. The 'WhatsApp group' allows Shopwatch members to communicate 'prevention' messages to each other, with intelligence being exchanged daily. The system has added advantages in relation to the identification and location of Missing People and those who resort to begging in the town centre.
10. ASB has reduced by 28 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, good partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.

Funding and Initiatives

11. Since last full Council the following outcomes were recorded in relation to anti-social behaviour (ASB):
 - (a) 8 young people received first warnings for ASB
 - (b) 2 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
 - (c) 3 young people breached their agreements – a parent/guardian will now receive a letter advising the breach has occurred and this will be recorded on the Council's system
 - (d) 13 youths have been identified by Police as being involved in ASB and are now awaiting an interview and potential intervention activity
12. Also in this period officers have continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes resulting in the following actions that aims to improve behaviour and encourage responsible waste management:
 - (a) 4 court prosecutions
 - (b) 1 community protection notice
 - (c) 3 community protection warnings
 - (d) 8 "open file" investigations
 - (e) 1 final warning
13. During the whole of 2023/2024 the actions in relation to youth crime and ASB remain strong with intervention and engagement key to deterring those on the cusp of criminality.
 - (a) 48 First Warnings were given
 - (b) 7 Final Warnings were given
 - (c) 35 Anti-Social Behaviour Agreements signed
 - (d) 13 Anti-Social Behaviour Agreements breached

- (e) 99 Young people from 104 have been deterred from entering the criminal justice process. However, five young people have not been deterred and they have entered the criminal justice process. Diverting 99 young people equates to a saving of £936,000¹ as well as improving their life chances.
14. Funding has been secured (£120,000) via the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner Commissioning process which will allow for Future Pathways, based at Eastbourne Community Centre, to provide 'youth intervention' work, designed around a full family approach, to those young people across the Town who need support. This will also include arranged activities during school holiday periods.

Operational Updates

15. Operation Stallion targeted the sale and supply of counterfeit watches in Darlington. Guilty pleas have been entered to all ten charges under the Trade Marks Act 1994. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for 24 June 2024.
16. Operation Nightstar is targeted at the supply of illegal cigarettes and vapes that have impacts on health, the economy, safety and child exploitation. This multi-agency operation led jointly by Darlington Trading Standards and Durham Constabulary has seen the following outcomes:
- (a) Action taken against 28 problem traders.
 - (b) 5,204 Illegal vapes with a value of £75k have been removed from retail sale.
 - (c) 19,624 Packets of illegal cigarettes and 64.45 kg of hand-rolling tobacco have been seized with a value of £259k.
 - (d) Illegal goods worth more than £355k have been removed from the streets of Darlington. Two vehicles used in this illegal supply have been seized and crushed.
 - (e) Four premises have been closed by the Courts for periods ranging from two to six months. Investigations will continue and there will be further actions in due course.
17. Trading Standards are actively supporting the National Scambusters team and have been able to return money to two elderly victims of fraudulent mail scams. Upon returning this money Trading Standards have been able to offer advice on how these types of frauds work and how to avoid further victimisation.
18. Further action is being undertaken on the Begging and Rough Sleeping issues in the town. Community Safety staff are taking part in a multi-team initiative to conduct early morning weekly sweeps intended to engage vulnerable people sleeping/begging outside. A 'tasking and co-ordination' processes seeks to focus upon repeat and prominent offenders and officers from various services continue to offer support to those who need it, whilst trying to tackle problem beggars.

¹ Costs have been taken from 'The cost of a cohort of young offenders to the criminal justice system' published June 2011 by the National Audit Office.

19. Number Forty was open on Friday 8 and Saturday 9 March 2024 to celebrate International Women's Day and to promote Number Forty (recruit volunteers and encourage use of the venue). Ten new volunteers have enrolled to assist Number 40 following several community engagement campaigns in recent weeks. Funding secured from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Serious Violence Fund will allow for 'StreetFriends' to be routinely deployed within the Town Centre area during opening times. The initiative will begin later this month and will provide on-street support to those enjoying the Night-Time Economy (NTE).
20. A successful prosecution of an unlicensed dog breeder resulted in that person being banned from keeping dogs. This case was linked to two other unlicensed dog breeders who were successfully prosecuted last year. Two further (unconnected) prosecutions are pending court summonses.
21. A series of events have taken place to raise awareness in relation to hate crime and terrorism:
 - (a) A representative of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) attended the Darlington UNITY meeting on 17 April 2024 and presented information on Hate Crime and how the CPS deal with it.
 - (b) A joint visit with the Police Cohesion Unit was made to Hurworth House school (Special Educational Needs) to deliver age-appropriate awareness sessions to five classes about 'online risk' around terrorism.
 - (c) 'Face to face' PREVENT awareness training sessions to approximately 40 individuals including 10 counsellors working for ARCUS (Darlington based LGBTQ+ counselling provider), 15 teachers in Longfield Academy and 16 members of 'listening post' (Darlington churches listening and mentoring scheme).

Climate Change

22. In the last six months, Take Me Taxis (formally 1AB) have increased the number of emission free vehicles from 1 to 6, and the number of hybrid vehicles has risen from 14 to 36.

Darlington Cares

23. A celebration event was held on 27 March for the Darlington Cares volunteer who carried out work in Darlington Parks last year.
24. Staff from Darlington Economic Campus, Redde Northgate, Cummins, and EE have been working hard since they pledged more than 3,600 volunteering hours to help the local environment last year.
25. Working with the friends groups, volunteers have helped make improvements to the Denes, Stanhope Park, Eastbourne Park and Fryers Field.
26. Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership, the sister initiative of Darlington Cares held the latest in its series of 'network and learn' events at Redde Northgate. The focus of

the event was electric vehicles. After a presentation and discussion on the practicalities of organisations switching to electric vehicle fleets, there was an opportunity to test drive a range of vehicles.

Voluntary and Community Sector

27. A meeting of the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group was held on Thursday 18 April.
28. The Assistant Director for Economic Development attended and gave a present on the Long Term Plan for Towns fund which Darlington is to receive.
29. The aim of the fund is to regenerate towns over the next decade. Towns will identify the measures that matter most to local people. The fund has three investment themes: safety and security, transport and connectivity, high streets, heritage and regeneration.
30. He emphasised that initiative was to be community led and the group would have the opportunity to provide representation on the Board.
31. The group also discussed the extension to the DWP Household Support Fund. As in previous rounds the local voluntary sector organisations would play a major role in its delivery.

Councillor Dr Amanda Riley
Stronger Communities Portfolio