

# Darlington

## Area Assessment

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**oneplace**

for an independent overview  
of local public services

## Contents

Darlington at a glance

How is Darlington doing?

About Darlington

How well do priorities for Darlington express community needs and aspirations?

Priorities for Darlington

- Prosperous Darlington
- Aspiring Darlington
- Healthy Darlington
- Greener Darlington
- Safer Darlington

## Darlington at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Darlington. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

**Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from**

No green flags have been identified for Darlington

**Red flags - significant concerns, action needed**

No red flags have been identified for Darlington

## The local area

The borough is a compact area of approximately 76 square miles, comprising the town of Darlington, a number of rural settlements, villages, and a swathe of countryside stretching north from the River Tees.

The borough population is around 100,500 people. Approximately 87,300 people live in the town of Darlington.

People from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds make up 2.1 per cent of the population, although this figure does not include the majority of Gypsies and Travellers, who constitute the largest minority group. By 2011 it is likely that one person in every five will be of retirement age.

Manufacturing industry has declined with a corresponding growth in people employed in the service sector. Darlington Borough Council is the biggest employer but there are still some major construction and manufacturing companies in the area. Darlington as an economy is small compared to its neighbours but has significant advantages relating to its excellent major road, rail and air transport links.

The Borough forms part of the Tees Valley City Region, home to some 662,100 people living mainly around the lower Tees. It includes Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Darlington and Hartlepool.

The next section tells you how Darlington's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

## How is Darlington doing?

### Prosperous Darlington

As with all parts of the country the recession has hit Darlington hard. However, its impact has been limited by the number of new employers and new jobs which have been brought into the area in recent years.

Darlington is not dependent upon a single large employer as in some other areas. Darlington's 'Into Work' programmes have made progress in improving employment rates in the most deprived areas and average pay levels have increased. The recession that started in late 2008 and has continued into 2009 has set back much of this progress.

The Partnership is working to improve the skills of the work force to make them more employable. Services are also in place to support people who need help - for example because they have lost their job. Services for people who become homeless are very good.

Council residents enjoy a high quality of accommodation with houses exceeding the national decent homes standard. More non-council housing is being built that people can afford but this will still not be enough to meet demand.

Gypsies and Travellers are the largest ethnic minority group in Darlington. Darlington has considered their needs and made major improvements to the local accommodation site. Further changes are necessary but Darlington will need to work with the other authorities to improve things locally and across the Tees Valley region.

### Aspiring Darlington

Darlington Partnership - the Local Strategic Partnership - has recognised the vital importance of improving the prospects for all young people in the area as part of achieving its vision for the borough.

Educational standards are improving. Exam results have improved and are better than those of similar authorities for children at age 11 and are as good as the national average at age 16. The difference between the highest and lowest performing secondary school has also narrowed. However, children and young people who are on free school meals and those who have special educational needs did less well than in similar areas in 2008.

Two local colleges have been judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Increasing numbers of 16 to 18 year olds are employed, are in education or training. By the age of 19 satisfactory exams and qualifications are being achieved. There are, however, fewer young people from low income backgrounds achieving

these standards.

In the past Darlington had high rates of pupil exclusion but these problems are being tackled with considerable success. This has resulted in a big drop in permanent exclusions over the last two years. There are also fewer young people committing crimes for the first time.

There are some things that need to improve. A survey of children said that too many were worried about bullying.

The partnership understands the issues and what they need to do to improve. Children with particular problems such as disability are listened to and services are developed to meet their needs.

Action is being taken to make sure that people in Darlington have the right skills to improve job opportunities.

## Healthy Darlington

The Local Strategic Partnership understands and is taking action to tackle the important health issues in Darlington. Plans are in place to tackle the main reasons why people are likely to be ill and die early.

Closing the gap in life expectancy within the borough is being tackled by putting a wider range of services into areas where there is the greatest need.

Better services have been set up to reduce deaths from heart disease, strokes and cancer. These services are aimed at reaching more people across the borough and meeting their needs better. People in Darlington get good outcomes from their social care services.

Although there are significant issues with health inequality and life expectancy in Darlington progress is being made to help people live healthier lives.

Fewer people are smoking, the number of mothers who breast feed their babies is increasing and action taken to reduce obesity in children has produced improved results. Particular problems relate to alcohol abuse and the relatively high levels of teenage pregnancy. There are also high levels of admission to hospital for people under the age of 18. Services and actions are being developed by the Partnership to address all these problem areas.

Prospects for improving health depend on several things together such as education, employment, housing and leisure facilities. Even then, much depends on how people respond to efforts to help them.

## Greener Darlington

People who live in Darlington are happy with the local area, in particular its parks and open spaces. The Darlington Partnership has also been good at encouraging and introducing environmentally friendly approaches to travel and transport. But public satisfaction with local bus services is low.

The number of people using cars has reduced - with increases in walking and cycling. This is as a result of a nationally funded project to influence travel choices of Darlington residents. As well as this, fewer children travelled to school by car in 2008/09 compared to the previous year. This is good for the environment and good for the health and well-being of the residents of Darlington.

The management of waste has been a difficult issue locally, with recycling and composting rates below the levels achieved in other areas of the country. This is expected to improve following the award of a new waste management contract in April 2009.

Action to lessen the impact of climate change is being taken. A number of things have been done to reduce CO2 emissions including reducing energy consumption in public buildings and supporting people to reduce fuel costs in their own homes.

## Safer Darlington

Crime in Darlington is reducing. The Local Strategic Partnership works well to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and improvements are likely to continue.

The number of crimes has decreased over the past three years: between March 2007 and March 2008, overall crime reduced by 17 per cent. Since then the trend has continued in the right direction with total crime in 2008/09 showing further reduction.

Alcohol issues are being addressed. The Partnership recognises this as an important issue. Action is also being taken on the street to prevent anti-social behaviour especially when alcohol is involved.

Young people are being involved. Area Youth Forums have been developed in all areas to involve young people in decision making.

Road safety has also improved and there have been big reductions in the number of deliberate fires.

Local people's fear of crime is understood by the partnership and action is being taken to target areas where crime and disorder are a particular problem.

Despite this alcohol abuse issues remain particularly in relation to under age drinking. There are too many young people admitted to hospital for alcohol problems. There are also increasing numbers of reported cases of domestic violence. Things are being done to tackle these problems but it is not yet possible to say how well they will work.

## About Darlington

A recent survey shows that in Darlington 79 per cent of people are satisfied with their immediate local area as a place to live. This is higher than the

average for similar areas and broadly the same as the national average of 81 per cent.

Sitting astride the East Coast main line railway and the A1(M) motorway at the southern end of the region, Darlington has come to be recognised as the gateway to the North East and to the Tees Valley Region. The borough functions as a sub-regional centre for employment, shopping, arts and entertainment, with over one million people living within 20 miles of the town centre.

The borough is a compact area of approximately 76 square miles, comprising the town of Darlington, a number of rural settlements and attractive villages, and a swathe of countryside stretching north from the River Tees.

The borough population is around 100,500 people living in 45,000 households. Approximately 87,300 people live in the town of Darlington.

People from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds make up 2.1 per cent of the population, although this figure does not include the majority of Gypsies and Travellers, who constitute the largest minority group. There is a significant community of people of Bangladeshi origin. Migration from the east European countries of the newly expanded European Community is a recent phenomenon for which there is not yet definitive data. Proxy indicators, for example national insurance and doctors' registrations, suggest this new demographic group could number over 1,000 people at the beginning of 2008. By 2011 it is likely that one person in every five will be of retirement age.

Manufacturing industry has declined with a corresponding growth in people employed in the service sector. Darlington Borough Council is the biggest employer but there are still some major construction and manufacturing companies in the area. Darlington as an economy is small compared to its neighbours but has significant advantages relating to its excellent major road, rail and air transport links.

The Borough forms part of the Tees Valley City Region, home to some 662,100 people living mainly around the lower Tees. It includes Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Darlington and Hartlepool.

The Partnership structure of a Board, currently with 34 members, and five supporting strategic theme groups is designed around the sustainable community strategy - "One Darlington: Perfectly Placed".

One Darlington: Embracing its approach to people, and specifically the need to make sure that people are not disadvantaged by their lack of income, where they live or by any other potential disadvantage that could cause them to miss out on the opportunities that will be created by realising the vision.

Work through the supporting themes are delivering results against this priority as summarised below:

- Educational standards for children are improving and increasing numbers of 16 to 18 year olds are employed, are in education or training.
- Unemployment is increasing as a result of the recession but action is being

taken to make sure that people in Darlington have the right skills to improve job opportunities.

- Services are also in place to support people who need help, services for people who become homeless are very good.
- Inequality particularly relating to health is the biggest challenge in Darlington. The Local Strategic Partnership understands and is taking action to tackle the important health issues in Darlington.
- Particular problems relate to alcohol abuse and the relatively high levels of teenage pregnancy. There are also high levels of admission to hospital for people under the age of 18. There are also increasing numbers of reported cases of domestic violence.
- Services and actions are being developed by the Partnership to address all these problem areas but it is too soon to say how successful they will be.

Perfectly Placed: Describing Darlington as a place and helping to shape investment decisions, spatial planning and care for the environment.

Work through the supporting themes are delivering results against this priority as summarised below:

- People who live in Darlington are happy with the local area, in particular its parks and open spaces.
- Waste management is being improved.
- The Darlington Partnership has also been good at encouraging and introducing environmentally friendly approaches to travel and transport. But public satisfaction with local bus services is low.
- A number of things have been done to reduce CO2 emissions including reducing energy consumption in public buildings and supporting people to reduce fuel costs in their own homes.
- Council housing is of a very high standard.
- The impact of recession has been limited by the number of new employers and new jobs which have been brought into the area in recent years.
- Crime in Darlington is reducing. The Local Strategic Partnership work well to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and improvements are likely to continue.

Supporting Theme Groups:

- Prosperous Darlington
- Aspiring Darlington
- Healthy Darlington



- Greener Darlington

- Safer Darlington

The Darlington Assembly brings together up to 200 representatives from across the community twice each year to discuss and contribute to the Partnership's work on key issues and programmes.

## How well do priorities for Darlington express community needs and aspirations?

The biggest challenge for Darlington is to narrow the gap between people in the better and less well off parts of the borough.

In some parts of the borough, unemployment is high, people can't always afford a decent home, they don't live as long as in other parts of the Country and their overall health is poor. Children in some areas don't perform as well in school which means their opportunities later on are limited. As with other areas of the Country the economic downturn increases the size of this challenge.

Local public services are well aware of the challenges. They have a clear plan, with an agreed set of priorities and targets from now to 2021. Their aim is to tackle what needs to be improved to build a better quality of life for everyone across the borough.

People in Darlington have a big say in the planning and delivery of services. Plans have been developed through involving all types of people from all parts of the borough including rural areas, different faith groups, older age groups and young people. More people in Darlington also say that they know how to get involved in local decision making than other areas of the Country.

The Partnership has carried out work to learn more about the needs of minority groups. Gypsies and Travellers are the largest group of people from a minority ethnic background. Darlington has responded to their needs in a number of ways, for example through schemes such as Sure Start. Gypsies and Travellers have particular accommodation requirements but action still needs to be agreed with the other local authorities in the Tees Valley to meet this need.

Partners work well together. Their work is paying off in some areas, for instance in reducing crime and the numbers of people smoking. People from different areas of the community are involved in the management of the Partnership, for example the editor of the local paper is a member of the Partnership Management Board. This means that the local public services are independently challenged on how they are performing. This gives more confidence that they will deliver on their promises and improve results for the borough.

## Prosperous Darlington

Darlington Partnership is working to reduce the impact of the recession on Darlington. While unemployment has increased, there has also been new inward investment bringing in new jobs to the town.

There are well advanced plans to bring in a Teesside University campus to help redevelop part of the town centre and provide a focus for raising skill levels in the area. Teesside University opened a temporary centre in September 2009, until the new campus is ready. This is being supported by a skills survey, carried out in summer 2009, for all local companies, to help better gauge the demand for particular skill sets.

Darlington's 'Into Work' programmes were effective in improving employment rates in the most deprived areas and average pay levels increased significantly. However, the impact of the recession has resulted in increased unemployment with the sharpest rises in the more deprived wards of the town. The long term unemployed are now in competition with people who have recently lost their jobs and are better skilled.

Unemployment in Darlington has increased but is still slightly lower than the North East average. There were sharp rises in unemployment everywhere in the country in 2009. In Darlington an extra 2.1 per cent of people were out of work in 2009 but unemployment levels are still below the North East average. Over 2,000 new jobs have been created over the last three years. New employers and jobs have been brought into the area since 2006. For example the Argos Distribution centre employed 700 additional people.

Wage levels have increased in recent years and are high compared to the rest of the North East. The partnership set out to raise wage levels in Darlington as one of the key ways of improving its prosperity. Between 2006 and 2008 wages increased by 14 per cent which was twice as fast as the average for other areas of the Country. In 2008 the average wage was £439 per week compared to the North East average of £421 per week.

People receive the right kind of support at a time of crisis. Services for the homeless are good and are being improved to provide more choice and increased levels of support. A new service, Key Point of Access, improves access routes to services and acts as a "hub" of information on all homelessness issues. Very few people are in temporary accommodation and there is no problem of rough sleeping.

Council residents enjoy a high quality of accommodation. The condition of council housing in Darlington is good. Darlington has invested in its housing stock to raise the standard of accommodation to a higher level than the government's decent homes standard well in advance of the 2010 target date.

The demand for affordable houses in Darlington far outstrips the numbers that are available. In 2007/08 there were 626 people wanting houses but only 50 available. Darlington is taking action to tackle its affordable housing issues. More affordable housing is planned as part of new developments in the coming years. The partnership is also being proactive to take advantage of new government initiatives, such as the Kickstart initiative, and by securing local authority new build funding. The number of affordable homes built will still fall well short of requirements but these measures will limit the negative

impact the recession has on the numbers built.

The housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers are not currently being fully met. Darlington has considered their needs and made big improvements to the dedicated accommodation site, including: upgrading the electricity supply, toilet facilities and street lighting. The number of caravan pitches has also been increased and better facilities for children have been put in place. There is still an identified need for more permanent and more transit provision as well as an increase in the housing related support, but the Tees Valley authorities have not yet agreed how these needs will be met. This means that Gypsies and Travellers do not have the same choices available to them as others in the community.

We will closely monitor the impact of the recession on Darlington in the coming year to see how far the Partnership's approach can protect the area from the worst effects of the downturn.

Tees-wide working:

Partners across the Tees Valley have worked together well - including through the development of Tees Valley Unlimited - to raise the profile of the area and develop a good case for investing in it. As a result Tees Valley was one of the first Multi Area Agreements signed off by government. By working together strategically they have succeeded in getting more money for the sub-region from government to support some key projects which will help to improve the area in future. The planned metro system is one example of this.

But not all partnership working has been as successful. Joint work to improve employment and skills in the longer term has not progressed well. The group which leads this has not been meeting regularly and is now being re-shaped. Sub-groups to work on specific themes are being put in place. The local authorities and partners in Tees Valley Unlimited recognise that more work is needed to develop a good enough understanding of what works well and what Tees Valley needs to do to compete better in a global economy.

We will be looking closely at this aspect of joint working in Year 2 of CAA, and report on how well the partners' are making progress against their long term plans to enable people and businesses in Tees Valley to compete.

## Aspiring Darlington

Darlington Partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership, has recognised the vital importance of improving the prospects for all young people in the area as part of achieving its vision for the borough.

Educational standards are improving. Results overall have improved and are better than those of similar authorities at age 11 and match the national average at age 16. The variation between the highest and lowest performing secondary school has narrowed but there are inequalities in achievement between groups.

Overall, pupils recorded by schools as having some level of special educational needs in 2008 did less well in Darlington than in similar areas. Partners have

analysed the reasons for this and more specific information shows that these pupils make at least satisfactory progress over time at school. An inspection in 2007 said that Darlington's special needs school was good.

Children and young people who are on free school meals achieve lower school results. Darlington is aware of these issues and targets resources at pupils living in the most deprived areas. Local data shows that more pupils from these areas obtain good GCSEs.

Longstanding problems with high rates of pupil exclusion and non-attendance have been addressed rigorously and with considerable success. The Council has worked with schools to develop measures to reduce the numbers of children who were permanently excluded from Darlington's seven secondary schools, resulting in a reduction from 47 to 23 permanent exclusions in 2007/08, and to 20 in 2008/09.

A survey of children in Darlington said that too many were worried about bullying. This is being addressed through the anti-bullying strategy and there are training events to ensure that key staff are equipped to deal with this issue. An anti-bullying co-ordinator has been appointed to lead on this work.

Road safety has improved for children. The number of schools with travel plans has increased and there has been a good reduction of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents in 2008/2009.

Fewer young people are getting involved in crime for the first time. This is as a result of actions taken by the partnership.

Two local colleges have both been inspected by Ofsted within the last 12 months and have been judged outstanding. More 16 to 18 year olds are in education, employment or training. The number of young people achieving level 2 and level 3 qualifications, such as General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ), by age 19 matches the average of similar areas and the national figure. There are, however, fewer young people from low income backgrounds achieving these standards.

Services for looked-after children and young people are good. Looked-after children are involved in the design and delivery of services. Moving looked-after children from their placement is avoided as far as possible. Recent data indicates that more young people now stay with the same carer for longer. The aim is to return children back into families wherever possible. Absence from school of looked-after children reduced last year from 14.1% to 8.5%.

Disabled children are listened to and there are plans to put in place things they need. Events have been held where disabled young people have been able to give their views on leisure, short breaks, activities and their lives. Plans are in place to provide short breaks and after school activities for disabled children and their families, as well as improving access to support workers and child care.

Action is being taken to make sure that people in Darlington have the right skills to improve job opportunities. A skills survey was carried out in 2009 to identify what skills are needed by local companies. Skills training to meet these needs is being provided by the recently opened Teesside University

campus.

## Healthy Darlington

Although there are significant issues with health inequality and life expectancy in Darlington, progress is being made to help people live healthier lives.

Plans are in place to tackle the major health problems in Darlington. They are based on the best evidence available of things that have been proved to work in other places. They focus on heart disease, strokes and cancers, which lead to more than half of early deaths in Darlington at the moment. The main health issues are understood and a number of large scale initiatives are already agreed or in place. It is too early to say if they are closing the gap yet. Other plans for improving health and increasing life expectancy are good but some of them are also very recent.

There is a good range of information for the public about healthy life styles and wellbeing. The council works in partnership with other agencies to provide advice and support to a range of people with disabilities, from diverse backgrounds, cultures, religious and ethnic groups and sexual orientation. The Black Minority Ethnic 'BME' Development workers are providing information and support for people from black and minority ethnic communities with mental health needs, and are raising awareness of mental health issues within these communities.

People in Darlington get good outcomes from their social care services. More older people are being supported to live independently and fewer people are going into long-term residential care. They are making good use of technology as well as major and minor adaptations to homes. Extra care is in place and works well for older people.

People who use these services are involved in every stage of their design and planning. But use of individual budgets is at an early stage.

The council has made some progress in identifying and developing new opportunities for employment for people with a learning disability. The council has a number of schemes and services which provide employment for people with disabilities and is further developing these. The percentage of people with learning disabilities in employment is twice the level in similar councils.

A recent inspection of adult social care services found that concerns about an adult's immediate safety were dealt with quickly, but that there was room for improvement in following up on some cases. There was also room for improvement in recording and communicating between the different agencies involved.

Health and wellbeing for some of the population is improving, but there is still some way to go to reach the national average. Death rates for women have not improved and there are major differences in life expectancy between people in the least and most deprived wards.

Fewer people are smoking - Darlington has proportionally one of the highest numbers of 'quitters' in the country and is one of only two areas in the region

to achieve national targets in 2008/2009. Smoking increases the risk of killer diseases that are common across Darlington. Services to help persuade more people to give up smoking are being focused on groups of people who find it difficult to change.

The number of women breastfeeding is increasing but is still well below the national average. High levels of breast feeding can considerably improve the prospects of better health for people throughout their lives.

Action to reduce obesity has produced improved results. The number of obese primary school children in reception year and in year 6 has fallen faster than across the rest of England. Obesity levels in children are still high compared to the rest of the Country.

Action is being taken to address alcohol issues. It is supported by a new regional office based in Darlington for tackling alcohol misuse. Harmful drinking and drug use are a problem. Hospital admissions linked to alcohol are very high.

The numbers of people under the age of 18 admitted to hospital is high. This is in particular linked to under age drinking but is also for other reasons including unintentional and deliberate injury. Work is being done by the local NHS Trust to investigate why this is happening and to put things in place to deliver improvements.

The number of pregnant teenagers in Darlington has also fallen but is still one third above the average. Work to reduce teenage pregnancies and to support teenage mothers is being focused on people who don't see the risk of pregnancy as a problem. Much of this work, and the efforts to reduce child obesity, are based around services to support families with a combination of social problems. Improved services for giving teenagers advice and contraceptives are also being improved and ways to do this better are being discussed with them.

Prospects for improving health depend on several things together such as education, employment, housing and leisure facilities. Even then, much depends on how people respond to efforts to help them, particularly in deprived areas where life expectancy is lower.

The harm caused by alcohol, through crime and disorder as well as poor health, will continue to be an important challenge for Darlington. We will monitor the progress made by partners in the coming months and report back next year.

In year 1 of the Comprehensive Area Assessment we have not reported in detail on the mental health issues affecting local people nor on the range of mental health services in Tees Valley.

In year 2 we will explore this theme in more depth. We will report on what the local partnerships are doing to address the range of issues which are linked to mental health.

## Greener Darlington

People who live in Darlington are happy with the local area, in particular its parks and open spaces. Most people in Darlington say that they are generally satisfied with the area. Children and young people express the highest levels of satisfaction with parks and play areas in the North-East. However, more people are concerned about the amount of rubbish and litter.

Household waste recycling and composting has not been as good as in other areas of the country. Work has been undertaken to improve this and public satisfaction with doorstep recycling has increased from 67 per cent of people satisfied in 2007 to 76 per cent satisfied with the service in 2009. High standards for recycling and composting have now been set. The plan is that a minimum of 50 per cent of waste will be recycled by April 2010, compared to the Government target of 40 per cent.

Darlington has invested to improve its waste management performance. The Council entered into a new contract to treat, recycle and dispose of all waste from 6th April 2009. One of the key parts of the new waste treatment and disposal contract is a high performance mechanical, biological treatment plant. This should greatly reduce the waste going to landfill sites.

Climate change is a priority for the Darlington Partnership and action plans are in place. A climate change action plan is in place agreed by the Darlington Partnership aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. There are some promising developments such as the new waste treatment plant and measures to reduce power consumption in public buildings which should deliver improvements in CO2 emissions.

People have been supported to improve energy efficiency. The Home Energy Advisor Team (Heat) is in place to give advice to people on how to save money on fuel - including cutting the amount of energy they use. Other projects help people save on energy by providing cavity wall and loft insulation.

The number of people cycling and walking has increased. Local Motion is a government funded scheme to reduce car use. Darlington was chosen as the only town in the North to do this. There has been a large increase in people cycling and walking because of this. Between 2004 and 2008 the number of people cycling increased from 1 per cent to 3 per cent and walking from 25 to 29 per cent. The use of cars to take children to school has also reduced. This is good for the environment but also for the health of the residents of Darlington.

Public satisfaction with local bus services is low. Only 45 per cent of people saying they are satisfied compared with 55 per cent nationally and 54 percent in the North East.

## Safer Darlington

Crime in Darlington has decreased over the last three years. Between March 2007 and March 2008, overall crime reduced by 17 per cent. Since then the trend has continued in the right direction with total crime in 2008/09 reducing by a further six per cent. The level of crime is just below that of other similar areas in the country. The number of young people who re-offend has also

fallen but too many young people are still getting involved in crime.

Local people's fear of crime is understood by the partnership and action is being taken to target areas where crime and disorder are a particular problem. High levels of crime in target wards have reduced.

An example of this is the 'Summer Nights' campaign which sees agencies working to tackle problems to do with alcohol. The annual campaign sees a crackdown by the police and the anti-social behaviour team in known hotspots. Despite this alcohol abuse issues remain particularly in relation to under age drinking.

Action is being taken to tackle domestic violence. The number of people reporting domestic violence has increased and this may be partly down to better awareness of the issue in the community. A team of people are in place, working with a charitable housing provider, to support victims of domestic violence.

The Partnership is responding to the concerns of the community. Local communities in Darlington have monthly meetings with local police officers, fire officers and other members of the Partnership to voice any concerns they have. For example, additional police patrols have been introduced in response to concerns expressed by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. To date 20 Partnership and Communities Together (PACT) meetings have been held and the partnership aims to hold meetings in all 24 wards. The Hate Crime Officer is a member of the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board.

According to the recent "Place Survey" the residents of Darlington generally do not see antisocial behaviour or drug users as a major problem.

Alcohol misuse is a problem with Darlington having one of the highest numbers of people under the age of 18 admitted for alcohol problems to hospital in the country. Alcohol misuse often leads to anti social behaviour, crime and health problems.

The Partnership recognises the importance of alcohol issues and they are being addressed. A lot of things are being done to improve the alcohol problem such as the development of a Pub-Watch Scheme and tackling those shops who sell alcohol to underage young people.

Young people are being involved. Area Youth Forums have been developed in all areas to involve young people in decision making. For example in one area young women have been involved in developing a campaign on alcohol use and misuse.

Information about how to report concerns about the safety of an adult is available on the council's website which has been redesigned to improve public access and connects with WebPages of partner organisations.

Team managers act as safeguarding leads and work together to deal with issues as they arise. The recent Service Inspection found that immediate problems were dealt with. But that there was room for improvement in following up on some cases, and also room for improvement in recording and



communicating between the different partner agencies involved.

The number of deliberate fires has reduced. There have been very large decreases in the number of fires that have been started deliberately from 742 in 2007/08 to 299 in 2008/09.

Road traffic accidents have reduced. There have been big reductions in the number of people killed or seriously injured from 66 in 2006 to 34 in 2008.

The harm caused by alcohol - through crime and disorder as well as poor health - will continue to be an important challenge for Darlington. We will monitor the progress made by partners in the coming months and report back next year.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>



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