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**DARLINGTON PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To update on the progress of Darlington Partnership since April 2013 and feedback on the progress of the Community Workstream in relation to the scrutiny committees recommendations.

**Summary**

2. Since April Darlington Partnership has instigated two significant areas of work. It has brought to fruition a good neighbouring scheme, 'Good Friends' and it has undertaken an analysis of poverty in Darlington and developed a series of recommendation to help ameliorate its impact. In addition Darlington Partnership held an Assembly which involved many of Darlington Borough Council's elected members.
3. The work of Darlington Partnership has been supported by a Community Workstream which operates in line with the recommendations of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

**Recommendation**

4. It is recommended that Members receive this report for information.

**Paul Wildsmith  
Director of Resources**

Author : Partnership Director Seth Pearson  
Extension 6090

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report is for information and will have neither a positive or negative impact on Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	This report is for information and will have neither a positive or negative impact on Health and Well Being
Carbon Impact	This report is for information and will have neither a positive or negative impact on Carbon Impact
Diversity	This report is for information and will have neither a positive or negative impact on Diversity
Wards Affected	This report is for information and will have neither a positive or negative impact on specific Wards
Groups Affected	This report is for information and will have neither a positive or negative impact on Groups
Budget and Policy Framework	This report outlines how the Council discharges the core function outlined in its Corporate Plan to “Support strong partnerships to set a vision and direction for the Borough”
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report outlines the primary means by which the Council engages with partners to deliver One Darlington : Perfectly Placed
Efficiency	The report highlights how other public agencies and other sectors are engaged to support the Council in addressing the needs of the residents of Darlington through agreed priorities.

## MAIN REPORT

### Good Friends

5. Darlington Partnership decided that 'Developing a Good Neighbour Scheme' would be its single Action Priority for 2013 – 14. The Partnership had already been deliberating how it could support elderly and vulnerable people in the community and therefore agreed that it would like to see an early focus on these groups.
6. Durham Constabulary, Neighbourhood Watch and Age UK Darlington took a leading role in exploring how a good neighbour scheme might be established.
7. The proposal which is now being implemented will see a network of Good Friends established across Darlington. These people will keep a watchful eye on their older and vulnerable neighbours, providing support and friendship and assisting them with a range of issues which if left unaddressed could compromise their ability to live safely and well independently. They will make brief contact to check up on vulnerable people who live nearby but will escalate the contact during known difficult times e.g. cold weather or when alerted to a specific problem.
8. The potential for the initiative to improve elderly and vulnerable people's quality of life are self evident. However the scheme will also help public agencies who are struggling to continue providing services at the level they are currently.
9. At a meeting of stakeholders chaired by the Chairman of Darlington Partnership, Alasdair MacConachie the proposal was met with warm approval and the following organisations agreed to provide funding the first year as a pilot:
  - (a) Darlington Borough Council,
  - (b) Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust,
  - (c) Tees Esk and Wear Valley Foundation Trust,
  - (d) Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group
  - (e) Durham Constabulary
10. Age UK Darlington are managing the implementation of the scheme and have already appointed staff to develop the network of 'Good Friends' and to publicise the scheme effectively. The aim is to recruit 1,000 Good Friends within the year and given the widespread support and the collaboration with Neighbourhood Watch we have every confidence that this will easily be achieved.
11. The initiative was officially launched by the Lord Lieutenant of Durham in October.
12. To date over 200 volunteers have been recruited and work is underway to match them to elderly or vulnerable neighbours.

## Poverty in Darlington

13. In a letter to The Leader of the Council, Bill Dixon, Tim Grant, Principal of Darlington College explained that they were seeing for the first time, students who are ill because they have not eaten that day as their family has no food.
14. In the letter Tim proposed that a new short term enquiry group is formulated to take evidence from front line organisations and then to look at ways in which we can more effectively relieve the impacts of poverty in Darlington.
15. Following discussion at the September Board it was agreed that Tim would lead the enquiry group. As poverty is a concern of all sectors and agencies in Darlington it was further agreed that this is an issue in which the Partnership should take a leading role.
16. The objective of the group was agreed as to ensure there is an effective network of interventions available for people affected by poverty in Darlington which reduces the impact of or helps people get out of poverty. To achieve this it aimed to:
  - (a) make an assessment of the current scale of the problem and
  - (b) review the interventions currently available

The group reported back to the Partnership Board in November .

17. As identified by the Child Poverty Action Group, the past five years have been particularly difficult ones for families with children struggling to make ends meet. Prices have risen more sharply than in previous years, especially the price of essentials, such as food and childcare. Wages have hardly risen at all. Benefit up-rating is now falling behind these increases. So, the cost of bringing up a family is increasing much faster than are family incomes.
18. For many families who were already struggling, these factors have combined to cause a serious decline in income at a time when what they need as a minimum has gone up.
19. There are almost 11,000 working age adults, 4,500 children aged 0-17 and 3,000 pensioners in Darlington living in households with a disposable income of less than £13,312 per annum who are therefore living below the 'poverty line', the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union.
20. The number of children and families in poverty is growing and the profile of poor families is changing. In 66% of families in poverty at least one person works.
21. As poverty is increasingly affecting working families, the geographic distribution of families in poverty is changing with poverty affecting people in areas seen as affluent.
22. Evidence from agencies working with this group of newly poor highlight a range of different problems faced by them. For some families their poverty is less obvious as they may apparently have assets but little disposable income to spend on food, heating and clothes.

23. Advice agencies report that families have lost financial resilience with savings dwindling and important equipment going un-replaced. Contents insurance for many is a luxury they can no longer afford. The consequence of this is that many families live on the edge of being able to cope and it only takes a small additional expense to place them in crisis.
24. Easily accessible but expensive credit is a significant factor as, for some, it is seen as the only available immediate solution but which quickly exacerbates their poor financial situation.
25. The partnership agreed that comprehensive support is made available for people facing crisis due to poverty close to where they live through peripatetic outreach in community settings. The aim would be that people can get at one go:
  - (a) access to a food bank
  - (b) advice (debt, benefit, housing)
  - (c) access to the Credit Union
26. A further strand of work would focus on improving people's income through employment.

### **Darlington Assembly**

27. At its meeting in July the Board agreed a number of 'conditions' that would need to be developed in order to realise the strategic ambitions for Darlington. It further agreed those conditions that it had the greatest ability to influence which include 'Darlington as a place where people organise themselves in order to help others in their community' (i.e. community led solutions) and 'Where people recognise the importance of taking responsibility for the way they and their families live their lives
28. The Partnership therefore agreed that the focus of the assembly was to consider how we can support our communities to be strong and thriving in face of the harsher conditions we are now experiencing.
29. Over recent years there have been a number of innovative initiatives established in Darlington, some through the Partnership (e.g. Darlington Cares, Good Friends). An additional objective of the event was to promote and build on our existing community led solutions.
30. A particular focus was how elected members can engage with their constituents differently in order to boost social capital and bring about change.
31. The event was held two days in advance of the 'Which side of the fence are you?' litter demonstration and so litter was used as an example where there was potential to make a significant impact with behaviour change.

## Community Workstream

32. As part of the review of Darlington Partnership it was identified that the existing process for community representation needed to be reviewed. A group of residents from the community partnerships, Friends Groups and local community activists were invited to work with the Partnership to agree how to ensure that representation was effective.
33. The group of 20-30 residents agreed a process for the operation of the community group as a broad group of active people with three representatives elected to sit on the Darlington Partnership. The role of these community representatives is to provide and geographical or/and community of interest voice on the partnership. It is expected that these representatives will be a key partner in the development of community based solutions.
34. In October 2012 elections were held for representatives from the community to sit on the Darlington Partnership. There were more candidates than places and a vote took place to decide who the representatives should be. One seat is currently vacant following membership being rescinded for non-attendance in accordance with the Partnership's constitution. Elections for this post will take place shortly and the process will be advertised in accordance to agreed procedures.
35. A number of sessions have been held with the broader community group of 20-30 attendees to discuss issues such as the changes to the probation service and the role of the police and crime commissioner.
36. In addition Councillor Andy Scott, who has responsibility for ensuring the Partnership's links with the community is in regular contact with the group to spread information and gauge opinion on topics being considered by the Partnership.