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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH & LEISURE PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of the Report**

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

**Healthy Darlington**

2. The Healthy Darlington themed Group met at the end of September. The theme of the meeting was addressing the economic downturn. Each organization represented on the themed group was challenged as to how it could respond to the current financial climate.
3. Three presentations highlighted different aspects of the issues but also some different approaches that are being adopted locally to try to mitigate against the current effects of the economic climate and also look to the future.

**Narrowing the Gap Inequalities**

4. The second workshop in a series of three to support elected members and senior managers in building an understanding of key concepts in public health and how they can be used to improve health and wellbeing. The workshop, "Protecting the health of the population of Darlington" covered topics including: the work of the Health Protection Agency; the role of vaccinations; pandemic flu and emergency planning.
5. The third workshop (11th December) will focus on Social marketing, communicating health messages and 'narrowing the gap' at constituent, ward level.

**Sports Development**

**Street Games**

6. Street Games have become a key partner within the Zone Active Project. Street Games is a national charity which develops sport with disadvantaged communities. Street Games have provided £3000 towards supporting the Zone Active Project within Darlington. Zone Active will use the money to engage more young people (12-19) in sporting activities.

**Sports Ability Club**

7. The Zone Active team are currently mid way through the delivery of their second Sports Ability Course to engage residents with disabilities in sport and physical activity. Working alongside local clubs and community groups Darlington Sport Development aimed to deliver a range of activities that will be suitable for all ages and abilities.

8. The course runs on a Tuesday evening from 4:00 – 5:00pm starting Tuesday 22 September 2009 finishing Tuesday 24 November 2009. The Sport Ability attracts between 16 – 20 young people with disabilities on a weekly basis.

### **Zone Active Football Festival**

9. Working in partnership with the Police, Youth Service and the Drug and Alcohol team the Zone Active Project held a Zone Active Football Festival at Eastbourne Sports Complex On Saturday 29 August 2009 for young people between the ages of 13-19. The Festival was a success after engaging with 47 young people on the day. The young people were given information on local clubs, teams and community sessions in their area.

### **SUNEE Street League & SWITCH Football**

10. The Sports Development team have worked with Student University North East England (SUNEE) to help support their delivery with a Street League Project within the area. Street League engages disadvantaged adults who are at risk of social exclusion in a structured 'sport for development' programme that builds on opportunities for clients to improve physical fitness, develop a better quality of life, acquire life skills and qualifications, and make positive choices as they make the transition to employment and independent living.
11. The Zone Active Project will support the Street League Project with facilities and links to all the youth projects/agencies within the area that could refer into the Street League sessions. At the moment the project is still in the development stage.

### **Easy line**

12. In partnership with NHS Darlington, Sports Development Officers have established an Easy Line programme within the Dolphin Centre working in partnership with Age Concern. Easy Line provides modular fitness equipment with specialist support from fitness staff that can be used by clients who are referred with a broad spectrum of needs. This programme will be extended into community settings to facilitate a targeted approach. By June 2010 Zone Active are hoping to establish an Easy Line Junior Gym for 12 – 16 year olds

### **Workforce Development**

13. Funding through Tees Valley Sport and the Zone Active project has enabled 33 coaches to access 56 courses across 13 different sports. These qualifications have improved the knowledge of local coaches working within the sports development team, and also allowed the service to deliver a wider range and more comprehensive programme of activities.

### **Events**

#### **Mayor's Ball – Friday 16 October**

14. The 2009 Mayor's Ball was a great success with over 300 guests enjoying an evening that celebrated "The Best of Darlington" whilst raising money for the Mayor's chosen charities.

#### **Darlington Community Walk – Sunday 23 August 2009**

15. Hundreds of people participated in a leisurely stroll around Darlington's scenic countryside whilst raising money for Diabetes UK or their own nominated charity. It was supported by

NHS Darlington, Diabetes UK, and Darlington Ramblers, Darlington Lions, Darlington Countryside team, Darlington Lady Harriers and the cultural Services events team.

### **The Tour of Britain – Sunday 13 September 2009**

16. Darlington was chosen for the second year in succession as a start venue for the Tour of Britain following the tremendous success of last year's event. We were requested to host the second stage start on Sunday 13 September, with the event finishing in Newcastle Gateshead. Thousands of spectators gathered in the town centre to witness some of the top racing cyclists depart from West Row in the town centre. At the start line were 300 local school children who waved off the riders with their hand-made flags and shakers.

### **Rhythm and Blues – Sunday 20 September 2009**

17. The annual Rhythm and Blues event was held in the Market Square and surrounding pubs on Sunday 20 September 2009. Headlining the event was The Animals and Friends with special guest Spencer Dais, supported by The Hamsters, The Cadillac Kings and the Rhythm Method. The glorious sunshine encouraged over 5000 visitors to the Market Square for a free afternoon of musical entertainment.

### **Civic Theatre**

18. Darlington Civic Theatre is a member of the Touring Consortium - a national network of theatres committed to touring and presenting high quality drama with innovative education programmes to support them. The latest production is Kes. Fourteen young people from the Education Village joined the production, and took parts as school children. They rehearsed with the director/producer prior to the show coming to Darlington and then performed alongside the professional cast for the week run. Their acting was of a very high standard and they have received many compliments on their performances.
19. The Civic Theatre also offered a free Page to Stage workshop for schools and a member of the cast visited Queen Elizabeth Sixth form College to talk to students there. Over 500 young people attended the midweek matinee performance and other school/college groups attended other performances.

### **Arts Centre**

20. The Arts Centre held its annual Rhythm n Brews Festival 17-19 September 2009, in partnership with Darlington CAMRA and the Arts Centre Rhythm n Blues Club. As ever, the event was very successful and attracted over 1,500 attendees over the three days.
21. In October The Arts Centre presented the premiere of Beneath the Banyan Tree by resident theatre company Theatre Hullabaloo. This colourful play celebrating cultural diversity was a co-production Canadian company Theatre Direct. The production was well received.
22. National Schools Film Week 19-23 October. The National Schools Film Week offers schools across the country a chance to visit a cinema and for some children for the first time. On Wednesday 21 October Darlington Arts Centre screened Ice Age 3: Dawn Of The Dinosaurs and 342 children came to see the film from four Darlington schools.
23. Working in partnership with Aiming High for Disabled Children a Saturday Cinema Club has been programmed, screening one film a month. These film screenings are to allow

disabled children, their family, friends and carers to experience a professional cinema setting and to be absolutely fine for anyone to go out for a break, make noise or move around at any time and be within a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

### **ArtsSpark**

24. ArtsSpark Youth Theatre and Dance have started a new term at Darlington Arts Centre, providing Youth Theatre and Dance sessions for young people from ages 5 to 18. ArtsSpark Youth Theatre Leaders took part in a development day for the Youth Theatre, to highlight opportunities for progression and create development plans, as part of ArtsSpark's work with the National Association of Youth Theatre (NAYT) to become the North East's NAYT Associated Venue (NAV).
25. Young people from ArtsSpark took part in the Tour of Britain Event in Darlington Town Centre during September. They were invited to make Banners, noisemakers and flags at an Arts workshop prior to the event before taking part in waving and cheering the start of the race along with children from Schools and other organisations across Darlington.

### **Arts Engagement**

26. Working in partnership with the Parenting Strategy Team within Children's Services, Darlington Arts Centre organised tours of the Arts Centre to showcase what's on offer at the Arts Centre for children, young people and their families, during National Parenting Week. Parents and young people were also given free tickets to an exclusive showing of the film Ice Age 3 at the Arts Centre during the week as part of the celebrations.
27. Darlington Arts Team have started work on a project with The Northern Echo, Darlington Youth Services, other Council departments, schools, third sector organisations and other stakeholders, to develop a TV Station/Media Hub for young people in Darlington Town Centre. A member of Arts Team is on the management steering group for the project.
28. The Arts Team are working closely with Youth Services to develop a programme of positive activities for young people on Friday and Saturday Nights. Darlington Arts Team supported the development and delivery of the BBC Blast Tour in Darlington at the end of September. The Arts Team worked in partnership with other Council departments and BBC Blast to ensure that all Darlington were aware of and took part in the workshops on offer, and that the offer communicated and promoted to young people throughout Darlington, and that young people were signposted to other arts and media activities on offer.

### **Visual & Public Art**

29. Two new artworks have been acquired for Darlington Borough Art Collection. The first painting was donated by Darlington Building Society and features the interior of the Civic Theatre, painted by Wendy Thompson during her residency at the Building Society. The second artwork is a framed photograph entitled Morning Fog on High Row by Peter Roberts. This artwork won first prize in the Big Snap competition.

### **Public Protection Division**

### **Pandemic Influenza**

30. Work has continued to progress on the Council's Pandemic Flu Plan to prepare for the potential escalation of the current flu pandemic. Illness rates have been increasing in recent weeks in the UK but numbers are manageable and locally are not causing problems in terms of delivering Council services. However, the situation is being closely monitored because of the potential for case numbers to rise quickly and threaten disruption to services.

### **Child Carers Course**

31. Environmental Health Officers have developed and delivered free training and awareness courses for home based Child Carers and Nurseries in Darlington. These courses are continually over subscribed and have been well received by clients. Clients are provided with manuals and training materials which support their businesses. Officers also carry out follow up visits to support carers in their homes and ensure that necessary standards are met.
32. This initiative was developed in partnership with the Children's Services Department and Darlington College. These courses provide registered Child Carers with essential information regarding the legal requirements and standards for home catering which forms part of their service and leads to the option of low cost or free certificated food safety training appropriate for their setting.
33. Since this scheme began the Food Standards Agency have developed a bespoke guidance pack specifically for childminders, which will be distributed as part of our strategy. Our scheme has been recognized by LACORS who are to cite it as an example of good practice.

### **Tees Valley Waste Compactor/ Baler Safety Project**

34. Compactors and balers are used to compact waste, either into a skip for collection by a waste contractor, or into bales for recycling. In the period 2002-2009 there were 11 major injuries/ fatalities involving the use of such machinery in the UK. The HSE and LAs are targeting premises to achieve a major reduction in the risk of serious or fatal injuries.
35. Darlington Borough Council's Environmental Health team is currently visiting businesses in Darlington to assess the safety of compactors and balers. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the risks associated, to assess the safety of the machinery and to work with the businesses to develop and improve safe systems of work. Enforcement action may also be taken if necessary.

### **Electric Blanket Testing**

36. Trading Standards carried out electric blanket testing on 28th and 29th October at Age Concern, Bradbury House. The campaign has been undertaken each year since 2003.
37. Last year there was a 43% failure rate on electric blankets, whereas in previous years the failure rate has been around 30%. This year 114 blankets were tested and 52, or 46%, failed. Vouchers were given for discounts on new blankets for those whose blankets failed.

### **Selecting Hearing Protection Guidance for Workers in Pubs and Clubs**

38. Exposure to excessive noise is the most common cause of preventable hearing loss in the world, according to research undertaken by the World Health Organisation.

39. In 2008, the Council's Environmental Health Section, in partnership with other Tees Valley Councils undertook a Tees Valley wide noise project. The project focused on employees working in the entertainment industry, predominantly in pubs and clubs and involved measuring noise levels in premises and providing advice on improving compliance with the Regulations. A free training day was provided in November 2008. This was followed up in 2009 by a trial of hearing. In addition to this officers of Darlington Borough Council were able to provide free hearing tests for a selection of businesses in the town centre, to assess the current hearing capability of some of their employees. This will be followed up in 2010 to determine if there has been any change as a result of possible exposure to noise.
40. From the project a new guidance leaflet has been produced by the five Tees Valley authorities: '*Selecting Hearing Protection - Guidance for Workers in Pubs and Clubs*'.

### **Reducing Violence in Retail Premises**

41. The Council's Environmental Health team has been working with other local authorities and the Health and Safety Executive to promote a toolkit to help licensed and retail premises deal with the issue of work related violence. The toolkit provides advice on carrying out risk assessments and the simple control measures that can be put in place to reduce the risk. The toolkit also contains practical advice on what other businesses have found effective.
42. For retailers of alcohol, the risk is higher especially if staff refuse to make a sale of alcohol to underage, or already intoxicated members of the public. To assist local businesses to be better prepared to cope with potentially violent and abusive customers the Environmental Health and Licensing teams, together with Durham Police, ran a series of training events on how to deal with potentially violent situations. 39 Local businesses.

### **Free Gym Membership Investigation**

43. In July 2008 Trading Standards Department warned residents about a letter being circulated offering 'free' membership to a local gym in the town.
44. Consumers received unsolicited leaflets informing them they had won a 'free' gym membership and were invited to attend the Penthouse Gym to collect their gift. At the Penthouse Gym, consumers met a representative of Millennium Experiences Ltd, who told them that although membership was 'free' there was a 'service charge' of £4.11 per week. Some customers deciding to subscribe thought they were signing a standing order mandate but they were actually entering into a two-year credit agreement with a further company, Fitlife Ltd. Trading Standards received over 100 complaints from local residents.
45. Consumers signing up to the gym membership should have been given the right to cancel within a few days of signing; however the companies involved failed to do this. Many consumers were subsequently pursued for unpaid fees and threatened with court proceedings or follow-up action from debt collection firms.
46. Following intervention by Darlington Trading Standards and subsequent action by the Office of Fair Trading, last month the companies involved, along with their directors, gave undertakings to change their working practices relating to the promotion and selling of gym memberships through credit agreements and their subsequent pursuit of payments.

**Councillor S Harker**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Leisure**

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