

---

**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO**

---

**Purpose of the Report**

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

**Public Health**

2. The Public Health Team are continuing to work with Officers from the contracting, procurement and legal sections to ensure that public health services are rigorously reviewed and that these services are developed to meet the needs of local people whilst providing excellent value for money. Equality Impact Assessments are currently being undertaken for a range of existing Public Health commissioned services which will enable the service reviews to commence. A new framework for procuring primary care services will also be agreed prior to March 2014.
3. I have promoted 'Dry January' as part of my Health Portfolio. The challenge to individuals to be alcohol-free for 31 days has stimulated a lot of conversation and debate about the place of alcohol in our Borough. Our Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) co-ordinated a 'Driday night out' on 17 January 2014 and a number of Councillors and Officers participated, with support from several Darlington pubs. The Communications team maintained high interest in the event by using social media and had the support from Alcohol Concern nationally.
4. Darlington, in partnership with the British Heart Foundation, has 'Heart Town' status. One of the strands is Heart Start training for schools, which has commenced in five Schools in the Borough.

**Darlington Partnership**

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 agreed it would like to see an early focus on these groups.
6. 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 provide services at the current level.
7. The aim is to recruit 1,000 Good Friends within the year and, given the widespread support and the collaboration with Neighbourhood Watch, I have every confidence

that this will be achieved. To date over 200 volunteers have been recruited and work is underway to match them to elderly or vulnerable neighbours.

8. In a letter to the Leader of the Council, the Principal of Darlington College explained that, for the first time, the College had seen students who were ill because they have not eaten that day as their family had no food. He suggested that a new short term enquiry group be formulated to take evidence from front line organisations and then to look at ways in which can effectively relieve the impacts of poverty in Darlington.
9. Following discussion at the September Board it was agreed that the Principal would lead the enquiry group and, as poverty is a concern of all sectors and agencies in Darlington, it was also agreed that the Partnership should take a leading role.
10. The objective of the group is 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.

11. 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.
12. 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. The number of children and families in poverty is growing and the profile of poor families is changing. In 66 per cent of families in poverty at least one person works.
13. 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. 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.
14. 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. 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.

15. 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); and
  - (c) access to the Credit Union.
16. A further strand of work would focus on improving people's income through employment.

### **Healthwatch**

17. Healthwatch Darlington is progressing well and is at the point of finalising the governance to become a social enterprise. It is already a registered company and is in the process of registering as a charity.
18. At the same time as progressing its governance structure members of Healthwatch have been busy agreeing the workplan for the period from September 2013 to April 2014. The workplan was discussed at the Health and Well-Being Board on 10th September 2013.

### **Equality Scheme 2012 -2016**

19. The annual review of the Equality Scheme was undertaken in November and a report was taken to Cabinet on 3 December 2013. This report recommended that work took place over the next three to six months to look at the most efficient and effective way of undertaking our statutory requirements within the Equality Act 2010.
20. This option appraisal work will also look at the way that local inequalities and social cohesion issues can be addressed with the Council's resources.
21. The remit of the option appraisal work will cover :
  - (a) Equality Analysis
  - (b) Equality Objectives
  - (c) Corporate Equality Group (Internal)
  - (d) Equalities Darlington (External)
  - (e) Training
  - (f) Public Sector Equality Duty
  - (g) Inequalities
  - (h) Social Cohesion
22. A further report setting out the evidence gleaned and recommended options will be taken to Cabinet in the Spring.

## **Welfare Rights**

23. The Welfare Rights Service continues to contribute to a range of local developments. Since the last report this has included: -
- (a) Work with the Lifestages Service and updated on developments in social security law and to assist with a number of enquiries;
  - (b) Support for the introduction of the Social Fund;
  - (c) Support for the Welfare Reform Group;
  - (d) Support for Darlington Partnership;
  - (e) Attending Dimensions' staff meeting to provide an update on the Welfare Reforms;
  - (f) Attending the Sexual Violence Partnership meeting to provide an update on the Welfare Reforms;
  - (g) Support for the Early Years' Service and providing information about the eligibility criteria for free school meals and free nursery places for two year olds to private providers;
  - (h) Support for the People and Families Information Service and providing information about the eligibility criteria for free school meals and free nursery places for two year olds;
  - (i) Attending the Deaf Forum to provide an update on the Welfare Reforms;
  - (j) Attending the Down's Syndrome North East meeting to provide an update on the Welfare Reforms; and
  - (k) Attending the Carer's Rights Day event organized by Darlington Association on Disability to provide an update on Personal Independence Payment and the Welfare Reforms.
24. Three individuals were represented at appeal during November – one lost and two won. This represents a success rate of 79 per cent (23 out of 29 appeals decided). In Darlington, there are no other organisations providing free tribunal representation. This has led to an increase in demand for assistance with appeals which is difficult to meet.
25. There has been an almost 60 per cent increase in benefit appeals over the last year, from the previous year, mainly as a result of the increased number of employment and support allowance appeals which increased by 86 per cent between April and June 2013.
26. It is anticipated that there will be a further increase in the number of appeals when Disability Living Allowance reassessments for Personal Independence Payments take place over the next four years.
27. Appeals dealt with by Newcastle Tribunals Service are currently taking approximately 40 weeks to be listed at Darlington; this does not take into account the length of time the appeal takes to be sent from the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) after the date of the benefit decision.

**Councillor A Scott**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Partnerships**