
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. We have, once again, supported the Annual Dry January Campaign. New research from Royal Free Hospital backs up just how good a month's break from alcohol is for the body; improvements in concentration and sleep patterns, as well as a positive impact on blood sugar levels, blood pressure and the liver. Information has been shared both internally, to improve staff health, and externally via the Darlington Cares Board.
3. The Mindfulness in Schools project continues across the Borough with 25 schools having received a six week course for pupils within their school. This has reached over 400 students and 35 school staff. The staff are now completing their own personal mindfulness course to equip them with further skills.
4. The mental health anti-stigma posters designed by Darlington College students have been used across the festive season on bus stops to promote positive mental health. The Campaign has been very well received and gained some positive media attention.
5. On 1 December, Darlington Borough Council joined other local authorities in the North East in supporting World Aids Day through lighting up the Town Centre clock red to symbolise the red ribbon associated with World Aids day. World Aids Day is an opportunity to highlight the impact of HIV/AIDS for communities and to challenge the stigma that individuals who are living with this disease are still exposed to.

One Darlington Partnership

6. One Darlington Partnership is organising a Volunteering Fair on 2 February 2017 which I will be opening.
7. A call went out inviting 'case studies' to be submitted from individuals who volunteer. The idea is to build a portfolio of volunteers that will be featured in a promotional campaign illustrating that volunteers come from all walks of life and therefore hopefully will encourage people considering volunteering. There has been an extremely strong response with over 80 case studies submitted. They will be featured in the One Darlington magazine and also on a social media campaign.

8. The campaign aims to attract attendance at the Volunteering Fair to be held in Central Hall on 2 February 2017. The aim once again is to provide opportunities for people considering volunteering to meet with voluntary and community groups who are looking to recruit more members. In addition, practical support will be available to groups to help them develop and potentially secure funding.
9. An invitation has been made to all Councillors to not only attend the launch but to encourage as many of their residents as possible to attend and join in volunteering. The invitation that was circulated to Members included a section for use in a Councillors' newsletter.

Healthwatch

10. Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) continue to signpost patients, both by raising awareness of services through engagement events, community access points and communications such as their e-bulletin, social media and newsletter, and by working with other Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations by informing and linking up to each other through the four networks in Darlington as well as regular communications such as the newsletters, e-bulletins, and emails.
11. The team appreciate the value of collaborating with specialist organisations and groups, especially within the third sector, and it is for this reason HWD have looked further to their facilitated networks for a more concerted strategic approach. These include the Mental Health, Learning Impairment, Darlington Organisations Together (DOT) and Darlington Ageing Well (DAWN) networks.
12. HWD have a small dedicated team of both full time and part-time employees including a self-employed colleague. Not only do the team fulfil their statutory duties, but they are also launching several projects designed to ensure that the voices of easily overlooked communities are not only listened to but understood and acted upon by key decision makers. These include dedicated pieces of work around children and young people and Black, Minority and Ethnic communities.
13. HWD have been meeting with commissioners over the past couple of months to discuss their upcoming budget cut and the impact it will have. HWD believes it will significantly reduce its activity, leave patients without a strong voice in the development of local Health and Social Care Services and limit its capacity to generate supplementary income in the future. HWD reported that its staffing capacity will be reduced from six part-time employees to two, with a significant subsequent impact on its core offer and, in particular, it will no longer have the team expertise or capacity to ensure that the patient voice is at the heart of decision-making.

Welfare Rights

14. The Government's proposed cut to the benefit cap was implemented in Darlington on 28 November. The original benefit cap was a new ceiling on total benefit payments per household, applying to the sum of a wide range of benefits for working-age claimants, of £26,000 for couples or households with children and

£18,200 for single people. The new benefit cap reduces these amounts to £20,000 and £13,400, respectively, with affected household's housing benefit cut to meet the new ceiling.

15. Revenues and Benefits have identified 178 households across the Borough that will be affected. The average weekly shortfall for households affected by the cap is estimated to be approximately £63 per week, which equates to a cut in total income of over 14 per cent. All of the affected households contain children and the vast majority are comprised of a single parent with three or more children.
16. Of 178 identified households, 50 are Council tenants currently being visited by Housing Officers to both inform them of the changes to their housing benefit entitlement, and to offer support and advice. Anecdotal evidence fed back from Officers involved in this work suggests that many of the households were unaware of the proposed change and, as a result of support from the Council's Moneywise team, several have already been supported to find work or claim an additional benefit which exempts them from the cap. The remaining 128 households will have been sent a letter by the Department for Works and Pensions to inform them of the reduction to their housing benefit and offer them an appointment with a work coach. Revenues and Benefits have ring-fenced a proportion of the Discretionary Housing Payment grant and extra burdens funding to help meet the expected increase in demand for these payments to meet rent shortfalls and will be able to support affected households who apply, but only for a period of up to 13 weeks.

Health and Well Being Board

17. The next meeting of the Health and Well Being Board is on 31 January and a review will be provided in my next Council Portfolio report.

Councillor A Scott
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Partnerships