

SPECIAL COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 JULY 2020

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES – COVID-19

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Communities and Local Services Scrutiny on the response of the Council to COVID-19 pandemic and note the Decisions taken with regard to the services relevant to this Committee.

Summary

2. This report sets out the detailed comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic by the Council, in particular for the service areas relevant to this Committee. The report includes the key dates, decisions taken with regard to specific services and information with regard to the work carried during the period.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that:
 - (a) Members note the content of this report.
 - (b) Recognise the effort and dedication of staff during this period.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Ian Thompson/Dave Winstanley : Extension 6628/6618
CD/LC

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no impacts on crime and disorder as a result of this report.
Health and Well Being	There may have been an impact on wellbeing of residents as a result of lockdown.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	During lockdown carbon emissions will have reduced.
Diversity	There is no impact on diversity as a result of this report.
Wards Affected	All wards affected.
Groups Affected	All groups affected.

Budget and Policy Framework	There is no change to the Budget and Policy Framework as a result of this report.
Key Decision	Not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	Not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report supports One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.
Efficiency	No impact on the Council's efficiency programme.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Background and Context

4. The COVID19 pandemic has been described as the single largest challenge faced by the Country since the second world war; whether correct or not, the scale of the challenge has been unprecedented in the lives of the majority of the population. Pandemics have been a feature of modern times, but nothing like this on a devastating worldwide scale.
5. For Darlington, like all other boroughs in the country, this has been a very challenging time and although there are many measures of the impact on society and the economy, the single most stark measure is the loss of life. In Darlington at the time of writing this report, 84 lives have been lost to the virus and 410 have been infected (as at 25 June 2020).
6. The figures above are a tragedy however, if it were not for the co-ordinated response of the Government, the public, the NHS, care workers, local Councils and volunteers, the impact would have been much greater.
7. In setting the context and background for this report, set out below are the key dates over the last four months.

Key Dates

(a) **18 March 2020**

The Government announced that all schools were to close until further notice. Further education colleges and universities closed too and summer GCSE and A-level examinations were cancelled.

(b) **20 March 2020**

Pubs and restaurants were ordered to shut, and the public urged to practice social distancing wherever possible on a voluntary basis.

(c) **23 March 2020**

A UK-wide lockdown was announced, backed by police powers to enforce social distancing and closure regulations.

(d) **25 March 2020**

Emergency legislation was introduced and passed in just four days, with the Coronavirus Act 2020 receiving Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The legislation gives further powers to Government to slow the spread of the virus; reduce the resourcing and administrative burden on public bodies; and limit the impact of potential staffing shortages on the delivery of public services.

- (e) **2 April 2020**
The government announced a significant expansion in the coronavirus testing programme with a target of 100,000 tests per day by the end of that month.
- (f) **6 April 2020**
In addition, all forthcoming local elections and other polls including the police and crime commissioner elections were postponed to 2021.
- (g) **16 April 2020**
The Government extended the lockdown for a further three weeks and set out five tests which would need to be satisfied before the lockdown restrictions were eased.
- (h) **10 May 2020**
The Prime Minister made a statement on the roadmap to recovery and the gradual relaxation of restrictions as and when it deems it is safe to do so.
- (i) **11 May 2020**
The Government published 'Our plan to rebuild: the UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy'. This set out a five-point scale to indicate the level of threat posed by COVID-19 to society and a phased approach to recovery, with incremental steps to relax control and public protection measures.
- (j) **13 May 2020**
The Government amended its existing regulations under the Coronavirus Act to enable the phased relaxation of lockdown measures including allowing people to visit HWRCs the re-opening of garden centres and some outdoor sports facilities.
- (k) **24 May 2020**
The Government announced the establishment of a £50 million Reopening High Streets Safely Fund, to adapt and re-shape high street shopping areas and business districts to make them safe and welcoming spaces, in line with social distancing guidelines.
- (l) **25 May 2020**
The Prime Minister confirmed the government's intention that schools should plan to re-open to some pupils from 1 June 2020 and that non-essential retail should begin to plan to re-open from 15 June 2020.
- (m) **26 May 2020**
Government announces that all non-essential shops can re-open on 15 June 2020
- (n) **23 June 2020**
Government announcing the relaxation of the two-metre rule provided there was mitigation in place to manage the risk and the ability of a variety of leisure, cultural and hospitality businesses to re-open on 4 July 2020, as long as they are COVID safe. Weddings can take place with some restrictions. The announcement includes the Government's intention to return all young people to full time education in September. Some businesses such as gyms are excluded from the re-opening announcement and are subject to further review.

County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

- 8. The Council in line with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) for County Durham and Darlington invoked its emergency plan and worked strategically with parties on the LRF to co-ordinate a joint response. Partners on the LRF are as follows:
 - (a) Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
 - (b) Durham University
 - (c) Durham County Council
 - (d) Darlington Borough Council

- (e) NHS (NHSE&I, NHS County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust and CCGs)
- (f) Durham Constabulary
- (g) Durham and Darlington Health Trust
- (h) Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services
- (i) Directors of Public Health
- (j) Public Health England
- (k) North East Ambulance Service
- (l) British Transport Police
- (m) Coastguard
- (n) British Red Cross
- (o) React- previously Team Rubicon
- (p) Northern Powergrid
- (q) Northumbrian Water
- (r) Northern Gas Networks
- (s) DHSC
- (t) MoD/JRLO
- (u) Environment Agency

9. A Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) was established which initially met daily 7 days a week and was chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable. The SCG was support by the Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) and a number of other specific groups that were established to provide data and information to the SCG to enable the appropriate strategic decisions to be made. The SCG stood down on the 3 July 2020 and handed over to the Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) which is chaired by the Chief Executive of Durham County Council. The role of the RCG is to have oversight of the recovery phase from COVID-19 across County Durham and Darlington.
10. It was recognised that staffing and resources could be significantly reduced during the COVID 19 pandemic, which could impact on the response to another incident such as such as Fire, Explosion, Terrorism, Flood or Civil unrest. A coordinated, corporate review to the potential response and plans in place to respond to these incidents in the light of COVID19 was undertaken. Emergency Response plans and arrangements were amended to reflect COVID-19 guidance and known issues.

Delegated Decisions

11. The Delegated Decisions that were taken in consultation with the Portfolio Holder were:

Subject	Decision	Date of Decision
Closure of public buildings including Dolphin Centre, Eastbourne Sports Complex, Hippodrome (including Hullabaloo), Libraries (Crown Street and Cockerton), Head of Steam.	Decision taken for the Dolphin Centre, Eastbourne Sports Complex, Hippodrome (including Hullabaloo), Libraries (Crown Street and Cockerton) and Head of Steam to close at end of play on Monday 16 March 2020.	16 March 2020
Closure of Household Waste Recycling Centre	Decision taken on Monday 23 March 2020 at 9.15pm that HWRC would not open on Tuesday 24 March 2020 until further notice.	23 March 2020

Subject	Decision	Date of Decision
To introduce a reduced fee for direct cremations (where no service is required).	Decision taken to provide reduced fees as majority of cremations through the COVID-19 period are likely to be to direct cremations and therefore do not require a service.	24 March 2020
<p>Lockdown provision - COVID19 Service Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks open but play areas to have closed signs on them but impossible to close them given most are in parks and open spaces • Car parking – to be free as don't want to collect cash and no enforcement and will help key workers if they can park free. Loss of funds minimal given no one will come but a big loss due to no one using them • Street cleaning to be responsive only to deal with significant issues that may affect health • Tip closed from today • Enforcement team to prioritise ASB work and support the Hub. • Bulky Household Waste collections ceased • Green Waste cancelled • Grass cutting ceased • Refuse/Recycling continues as long as resources allow • Staff where possible on key services as well as none key are working from home 	Service changes agreed from 24 March 2020	24 March 2020
Management of the support Hub	Ian Thompson will take overall management responsibility for the overall delivery of the HUB.	25 March 2020
Darlington Crematorium	Not to commence work on crematorium.	17 April 2020
Street Litter and Dog Bins	To empty bins from Monday 20 April 2020.	17 April 2020
Review of Street Scene Services	<p>Reinstating the following services at reduced capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household Waste Recycling Centre • Garden Waste Collections • Bulky Waste Collections • Litter/Dog Bin Emptying • Fly Tipping • Clearance of Rear Lanes • Large Mechanical Sweeper (Main Arterial Routes) • Small Mechanical Sweeping (Town Centre, Secondary Shopping Centres, Litter Hot Spots) • Litter Picking – Barrow Beats 	27 April 2020

Subject	Decision	Date of Decision
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gulley Emptying • Weed spraying • Grass Cutting Tractor • Grass Cutting Ride-On Mower. • Hand Mower (Reduced) • Sheltered Housing (Reduced) • Garden Tidy Scheme: Council owned properties (Reduced) 	
Review of Street Scene Services	Reinstating full Street Scene Service from 1 June 2020.	26 May 2020
Dolphin Centre Catering	To reopen No 16 Horsemarket for a takeaway service from 15 June 2020.	10 June 2020
Eastbourne Sports Complex Track	To reopen Eastbourne Sports Complex Track for bookings of 6 per hour from 16 June 2020.	10 June 2020
Reduction in Cremation Capacity	To reduce number of cremations per week back to 58 from week commencing 6 July 2020.	16 June 2020
Eastbourne Outdoor Pitches	To reopen grass pitches at Eastbourne on 22 June 2020 and artificial grass pitch on 29 June 2020.	19 June 2020
Dolphin Centre Bistro and pavement cafe	To reopen the pavement café from 4 July 2020 and the Bistro from 6 July 2020.	26 June 2020
Outdoor Play Areas and Outdoor Gym Equipment	To reopen outdoor play areas and outdoor gym equipment from 4 July 2020.	29 June
Reopening of Head of Steam	To reopen the Head of Steam from Tuesday 14 July 2020 with booking system in place and reduced price.	1 July 2020
Reopening of Libraries	<p>To reopen Crown Street and Cockerton Libraries from Monday 13 July 2020 with the following restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express service for book loans • Restricted access for browsing • Booking system for Local Studies • Restricted access for gallery space • No ICT usage 	1 July 2020

Subject	Decision	Date of Decision
Cease Pedestrian Training Service	Cease Pedestrian training programme	18 March 2020
ENCTS – Extension of Expiring bus passes	It is recommended that Bus passes due to expire in the next 6 months are re-ordered to ensure vulnerable and elderly have passes should essential transport be required and absolutely necessary	23 March 2020
Cease School Crossing Patrol Service	Cease School Crossing Patrol Service	23 March 2020
Suspension of Parking Charges in Council Parking areas.	To reduce the risk of transmission of the virus amongst the public and to protect staff from exposure.	24 March 2020

Subject	Decision	Date of Decision
Public Rights of Way (PROW) - Giant Hogweed Control and Vegetation Management	<p>Provided contractor can demonstrate compliant Risk Assessments and Method Statements compliant with COVID-19 it is recommended that the :</p> <p>Giant Hogweed Spray is undertaken but the grass cut is not implemented during the current directives but kept under review.</p>	26 March 2020
Darlington Station Gateway – Land Assembly	<p>It is recommended that the following options are progressed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land Referencing Questionnaires that option 1.2 be agreed and progressed 2. Acquisition by Agreement that option 2.1 be agreed and progressed 	27 March 2020
Service 16 – Scarlet Band	<p>Option 2 – Scarlet Band to suspend service 16 until further notice.</p> <p>Given that there have been fewer than 10 journeys made in 4 days on the unique section of the service 16 in Hummersknott and Mowden, the service is no longer viable in the current environment.</p> <p>Scarlet Band have requested to suspend the service, although the suspension is applicable to both the commercial and supported bus journeys.</p> <p>The suspension will be effective from Saturday 4 April until further notice.</p>	27 March 2020
Service 20 – Scarlet Band	<p>Suspend service 20 until further notice.</p> <p>Given that there have been fewer than 5 journeys made on the most recent day of operation (Monday 30 March), the service is no longer viable in the current environment.</p> <p>Passengers will be directed to the Tees Flex service, and the Community Support Hub who may be able to provide assistance with essential shopping and medication supply where regular users don't have family or friends to rely on.</p> <p>The suspension will be effective from Monday 6 April until further notice.</p> <p>Payments to Scarlet Band would continue as normal through the suspension.</p>	31 March 2020

Subject	Decision	Date of Decision
Electrical Testing of Street Lights	To carry out electrical testing as programmed	20 April 2020
Darlington Northern Link Road – Preliminary Ecological Appraisals (PEAs)	It is recommended that the Preliminary Ecological Appraisals (PEAs) are progressed as soon as practicably possible in accordance with the details set out in this Decision Record	24 April 2020
Haughton Road Throughabout retaining Wall	Allow Subcontractor to restart on site w/c 4 May ahead of main project restart to phase recommencement under supervision of DBC staff. (Subject to satisfactory methods of working being agreed)	13/05/20
Feethams – Urgent Deep patching repairs and surfacing	Authorise the undertaking of works subject to the necessary Health and Safety arrangements being approved.	12/05/20
Highway Maintenance Reactive Maintenance Programme and safety Inspection	Approve the increase in resources to gradually build up back to business as usual reverting to our normal inspection regime and repairing under the same regime as pre-lockdown.	15/05/20
Highway Maintenance- Micro Asphalt Patching & Surfacing Programme 2020/21	To progress with a revised Micro Asphalt Patching & Surfacing Programme subject to the revised Health and Safety arrangements being in place and review the schemes currently deferred closer to the time of programme delivery to see if these can be included.	27 May 2020
Highway Maintenance Schemes Programme	Restart the Highway Maintenance programme and add further schemes arising the additional funding recently announced as per the agreed schedule	28/5/2020
Highway Maintenance Schemes Programme – Deferral of a Scheme	Defer the Stanhope Road South/ Coniscliffe Road and West St Highway maintenance scheme.	28/05/20
Town Centre Social Distancing Measures	To implement the social distancing measures considered necessary to support the reopening of the town centre safely and any subsequent modifications within the principles of the government guidance. Authorise legal orders necessary to implement the measures.	26/05/20
Tees Valley E-Scooter Trial	To support the bid to become a trial area; subject to further detail and any outstanding safety, legal and other considerations identified being satisfactorily resolved prior to introduction.	8 June 2020

Employees

- It is essential that the hard work, dedication and flexibility of Council employees in responding to the challenge is acknowledged. The speed and skill with which employees have responded is exemplary, often against a background of personal

challenges in their own lives.

13. The initial approach taken was:

- (a) All staff to work from home where possible.
- (b) All key staff who were required to attend work to provide essential services, be provided with safe working environments including, where appropriate, the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- (c) Where services were stood down, and no longer provided, employees were available for re-deployment to essential services, in particular, the Darlington Community Support Hub.
- (d) For those services that were not directly publicly funded, e.g. leisure and cultural services, with agreement of staff and Unions, a number of staff were furloughed. The staff were paid in line with their contracts and were not financially worse off as a result.

Community Safety

- 14. Members of the Community Safety Team were deployed to support the work of the Darlington Community Support (Outreach) Hub between 25 March and 3 May 2020. During this period the Outreach Hub provided vital support to shielded, isolated and vulnerable members of the community through the provision of urgent pharmacy requests, food and welfare support.
- 15. The department was also instrumental in the development and growth of an emergency food supply which was distributed to those restricted by the pandemic.
- 16. On 4 May 2020, Community Safety personnel (with the exception of Civic Enforcement) returned to their daily tasks and local services have continued to be delivered efficiently through a combination of office based and virtual working activities.
- 17. On 1 June 2020, members of Community Safety were briefed and directed to provide additional support to town centre users to promote a safe and secure environment for residents, retailers and visitors.

Civic Enforcement

- 18. During the initial stages of lockdown, Civic Enforcement was utilised by the Outreach Hub to assist with distribution of urgent supplies, however, their role also extended to tackling anti-social behaviour, working closely with the Police to enforce social distancing and provide high visibility patrols throughout the Borough to promote reassurance in our communities.
- 19. As the pandemic evolved, the role of Civic Enforcement remained flexible to include other duties including the supervision of the Drinkfield Civic Amenities Site (following opening), the policing of the town centre after the easing of lockdown and dedicated patrols to tackle environmental crime within the Borough.

20. CCTV and dog warden services remained unchanged throughout this period.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

21. Due to the onset of COVID-19 all schemes were put on hold. Following a letter from Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Transport Minister for Roads, Buses and Places) to everyone working in the Highway construction and maintenance sector dated 24 April urging authorities to continue with routine highway maintenance and to try and maintain as close to a 'business as usual approach as possible'.
22. The Highway Asset Management team started to look at ways of ensuring works could start how the current programme of works could be constructed with safety to the general public and the construction workers being paramount. The following is part of the agreed programme:
23. Highway Maintenance schemes complete:
- (a) Feethams: Carriageway reconstruction (0.100km)
24. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
- (a) Carriageway Patching prior to Microasphalt (various – 31 locations)
 - (b) Estoril Road South (Full Extents): Carriageway reconstruction/recycling – (0.490km)
 - (c) Fenby Avenue (52 Fenby Avenue – Harris Street): Carriageway reconstruction/recycling (0.250km)
 - (d) Barnes Road (Claxton Avenue - Staindrop Road): Carriageway resurfacing (0.140km)
 - (e) A67 Merrybent (40mph sign heading east): Carriageway resurfacing – (0.460km)
 - (f) A67 Yarm Road (Morton Palms – Farmhouse): Carriageway resurfacing – (0.720km)
25. The majority of the programme will be delivered but some locations are being deferred due to COVID-19 constraints. The highway maintenance team are also programming an additional £1.2m of maintenance schemes to be commenced this year as a result of an additional allocation of maintenance funding from Government.

Highway Improvement Schemes

26. All construction sites were closed during the lockdown. Preparations began to reopen sites in the week commencing 25 May 2020. A review was carried out of the whole Capital Programme to identify schemes that needed to be prioritised. The B6280, Lingfield Way junction, the B6279, Haughton Road throughout scheme have all restarted safely and the Rethinking Victoria Road Project have been prioritised to start over the summer months.

Highway Network Management and Transport Planning

27. On 26 May 2020 Government announced that from 15 June 2020 some non-essential shops were able to re-open provided they were able to do so safely the Council were required to undertake an assessment and put in measures to support safe opening in the town centre. The Government issued guidance to enable Councils to prepare for the safe re-opening in Urban Centres and Green Spaces.

28. A team of officers from across service areas undertook an assessment process to identify constraints and the measures that needed to be implemented across the town centre based on the national guidance. The overriding principle in designing and implementing the measures was public health considerations and ensuring business could re-open safely.
29. This included a range of measures such as:
 - (a) signing and floor markings
 - (b) queue management systems and engagement with town centre business.
 - (c) relocation of market stalls
 - (d) re-design of bus services and bus stops
 - (e) reallocation of road space to people walking and cycling, both to encourage active travel and to enable social distancing during restart.
30. This required a rapid assessment process, organising of resources, legal work and implementation within a very short time frame. Most of the measures above were implemented ahead of 15 June to support a safe re-opening of the town centre.
31. Some businesses have not considered the measures appropriate. The measures implemented before shops re-opened were developed on national guidance, there was a very short window to get them in place to ensure businesses could re-open safely and there was no precedent on how customers would return after lock-down. The principle adopted ensured public health was a priority and there was enough space to social distance upon re-opening.
32. There has been a continual review process and engagement with business. The measures have been adjusted as and when it was considered appropriate to do so without compromising public health. Further reviews have taken place to reflect new guidance on social distancing that came into operation on 4 July. Further changes and measures will be required to adjust to a fast-moving situation.
33. The need to balance public health with the wishes of business is not an easy one but public health must be the highest priority otherwise there is a risk of a second spike in the virus, which in turn would have a direct impact on businesses in the town centre.
34. The Government announced a series of initiatives and funding opportunities during this period to support recovery. The Emergency Active Travel Fund and E-Scooter trial programme was announced that TVCA would lead on. The town centre social distancing measures were the subject of the bid to first phase of the Emergency Active Travel Fund (possibly £86k of funding to the Council) and a decision was taken to participate in the bid to become a trial area for E-Scooters.

Head of Steam

35. The museum's presence on the internet and social media has been increased by positing the 'Street Wise: What's in a Name?' exhibition online, which has been well received. In addition, the museum hosted a 'Virtual Vintage Rally' and planning is being undertaken around any future events which can also be held virtually.

36. Accessible family learning materials have been made available online and on social media. Museum staff have been proactive in making contact with schools, detailing ways in which we can support them in their teaching.

Creative Darlington

37. Creative Darlington has distributed information on funding programmes offered by Arts Council England and other parties in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand eight proposals from individuals, organisations and enterprises in Darlington seeking Emergency Funds from Arts Council England have been offered support of approximately £87,000 in total. Creative Darlington has also commented on the North East Cultural Partnership's North East Culture and Tourism Recovery and Resilience Plan and continue to liaise with various cultural organisations, enterprises and artists in Darlington regarding proposals in development responding to the pandemic
38. Following conversation between Tracks and Creative Darlington, Creative Darlington supported the first nine 'Darlo@Home' online concerts, which ran between 10 April 2019 and 2 May 2019 and encompassed a mixture of evening concerts on weekdays and daytime 'Big Little Gigs' concerts on weekends for a family audience. Musicians were paid to perform live and to share their performance digitally via the Tracks Facebook page, with Tracks curating and promoting the programme with support from Darlington Borough Council. As of 9 May 2020, Tracks advised the first nine online gigs had secured a total view count of 9,487 with a reach figure of over 20,000.
39. Darlo@Home programme received ongoing backing beyond 2 May 2020 within Darlington's events programme and has been promoted within #LoveDarlo. Darlo@Home concerts have offered people an opportunity to enjoy live music safely in Darlington as part of a diverse programme, providing artists a paid opportunity to share their music, including artist Nadeja whose performance was watched by family members in Brazil.
40. The Abode in a DL Postcode programme is a modification of an artist in residence model, through which artists would usually be invited to propose how they would react to a period of developing their practice in a particular setting or location. Instead, Abode asked artists to generate proposals regarding how they might work with one of a number of digital programmes within their own residence, offering an opportunity to safely explore and continue their practice. The Auxiliary approached Creative Darlington with a proposal to support the Abode idea in Darlington, having initiated the programme elsewhere in Tees Valley. Creative Darlington offered a budget and backed a Call Out, which enabled four proposals involving Darlington artists to be taken forward.
41. Darlington based ODDMANOUT Theatre Company were offered 'New In Town' support for a programme of creative community engagement which will involve people in Darlington and has been launched recently offering opportunities for creative engagement online. 'It's All Happening' is also being supported by Arts Council England through project funding.

Libraries

42. During the period the Libraries were closed during lockdown, an interim home service was offered to Darlington Library members aged over 60 whereby the library would deliver a selection of books to the doorstep, (maintaining appropriate social distances), which was replenished every four weeks. This has been incredibly well received with 233 people currently benefiting from the scheme and we have decided to continue the service indefinitely due to its popularity and the continuation of social distancing.
43. During Carers Week we delivered a free Reminiscence Book to Care Homes in Darlington aimed at sparking reminiscence and opening discussions between carer and resident about their early life and tales of the past. The books have been created by Darlington Libraries Centre for Local Studies and are themed around the 1940's to tie in with VE Day celebrations.
44. We recognised that children living in care may be more affected by the disruption in learning and their routine, so we teamed up with Darlington Virtual School to supply and deliver an exciting gift to all 113 children in long term care. The BookTrust Letterbox pack contains carefully selected books, learning resources and games designed to spark imagination and excite children to ensure learning at home is fun and interactive.
45. The library is usually bustling with activities for children and families so in the wake of our closures we took to social media and provided story times, arts and crafts and learning related content by video. We are now transitioning to providing a Summer Reading Challenge scheme online to encourage reading and book sharing at home. The Bookstart in Darlington Facebook page has attracted 2309 followers.
46. For schools who were maintaining teaching for the children of Key Workers, we put together an offer of a 'Box of Imagination'; a box full of fiction, non-fiction, picture and audio books, which we delivered alongside a box of props and costumes supplied by the Hippodrome. These were delivered for loan free of charge.

Darlington Hippodrome

39. Since closing to the public on 16 March 2020 due to COVID-19, our focus has been on the re-scheduling of shows where possible into autumn 2020 and spring 2021 and in some cases the announcement of cancellations. Work has been on-going to communicate updates to customers and issue ticket transfers and refunds where appropriate. At point of refund, the Hippodrome team also presented the option of donating the full or partial value of their ticket to support the theatre and the show's producers during this difficult time. £12,000 has been donated to date.
40. The theatre's online engagement has been active throughout the closure period. Highlights include:
 - (a) Youth theatre and dance classes quickly moved into online formats.
 - (b) Successful trial dance sessions for adults, which we plan to introduce into the theatre when we re-open.

- (c) The Theatre's twice weekly online quiz has an average audience of 1,500 people joining in.
- (d) Our recent backstage tour of the theatre has already been viewed by over 3,000 people.
- (e) The Theatre's vast collection of online heritage learning resources has supported the current home learning environment many families find themselves in.
- (f) We continue to explore new and exciting ideas for online engagement, recognising that it may be sometime before audiences can physically join us in the theatre.

Environmental Services

- 39. From the 24 March 2020, the majority of Street Scene services were stopped with the exception of Refuse and Recycling collection and a response crew for street cleaning to deal with health hazards. To enable these services to operate, safe systems of work were introduced, which included additional vehicles and staff so that a safe 2 metre distance could be maintained.
- 40. Street Cleansing and emptying of dog and litter bins was reintroduced on 20 April 2020. Further Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance services were partially reintroduced from 27 April 2020 and services were fully reinstated from 1 June 2020.
- 41. The Household Waste Recycling Centre was closed from 24 March 2020 and reopened on 28 April 2020 with appropriate social distancing measures in place, which had an impact of successfully reducing capacity on the site but resulting in queuing traffic on Whessoe Road. An appointment system was introduced from June, which is proving to work well, ensuring social distancing can be maintained and reducing any queuing traffic on Whessoe Road.
- 42. The Arboricultural service was initially suspended upon commencement of the lockdown, however the service is now back to full resource as of 1 June 2020.
- 43. The Building Cleaning service continued throughout this period with staff operating safe systems of work to ensure social distancing is maintained.
- 44. The Cemeteries and Crematorium service continued throughout this period, providing increased capacity when required.
- 45. Parks and open spaces remained open throughout the lockdown period to support the opportunity for residents to partake in daily exercise. Play areas remained closed and reopened from Saturday 4 July 2020.