

**COUNCIL**  
**24 SEPTEMBER 2020**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING 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 Housing Portfolio were as follows:-

**Darlington Local Outbreak Control Plan**

2. Cabinet considered the Darlington Outbreak Control Plan, which was published at the end of June 2020 to meet the requirement set by the Department of Health and Social Care.
3. The main purpose of the Local Outbreak Control Plan is to prevent and control outbreaks. Adhering to national and local guidance is key to prevent local outbreaks and a second wave of infection. A communication plan describes local approaches to delivering messages for the public for their own and others' protection.
4. We recently launched our 'Keep Darlington on the right track' campaign, which includes posters, adverts and key local messages for residents of Darlington. I would encourage all members to share the materials in their local communities.
5. Cabinet noted the Local Outbreak Control Plan is focused on seven themes including settings e.g. care homes and schools, higher risk locations and communities of interest, workplaces, data integration and testing capacity.
6. The COVID-19 Health Protection Board (chaired by the Director of Public Health) has the management responsibility for the Outbreak Control Plan and overall management of the local response. The Health Protection Board meets fortnightly, frequency can be increased if required i.e. in the event of an outbreak.
7. The role of a Local Outbreak Engagement Board is delivered through the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board which met on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020.  
<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/11967/darlington-local-outbreak-control-plan.pdf>
8. I undertook a visit to a number of licenced premises in Darlington with Durham Constabulary recently, where we focused on track and trace compliance and drug enforcement action.

**Public Health**

9. The contract to deliver the new STRIDE service (Support, Treatment and Recovery in Darlington through Empowerment) was operational from 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020. The COVID-19 Health Protection Board (chaired by the Director of Public Health) has the responsibility.

10. We Are With You are the new providers of the service and offer a range of flexible treatment options, including:
  - (a) A range of ways to access support, dependent on the individual's circumstances and preferences. This includes face to face, as well as online and telephone.
  - (b) A range of different interventions, groups and activities to support people in their recovery.
  - (c) Support offered in different community settings.
11. As the service mobilises, new opportunities will be introduced including a new Ambassador programme with Intuitive Thinking Skills, using the skills of those with lived experience to support others; Recovery Academy Darlington programme (RADAR) will be provided offering quasi residential rehabilitation in Darlington and the establishment of a new local Recovery Partnership, inviting partners and stakeholders to come together and help shape and develop the local service.
12. The COVID-19 pandemic has given further emphasis on the need to put plans in place to tackle obesity, given that there is strong evidence to suggest that living with excess weight put people at much greater risk. The Government has recently launched an Obesity strategy which supports our local work to implement the Childhood Healthy Weight strategy for Darlington. The action plan will be revised to respond to COVID-19 and to align with the measures set out in the Government strategy.
13. It is proposed that a key priority for this work in the first instance focuses around encouraging regular physical activity and maximising on potential changed behaviours that may have arisen as part of lockdown when an increase in the number of people participating in daily exercise was seen. This will include the promotion of cycling and walking, use of green space and active travel. There are clear links to physical activity and positive mental health.
14. For many people their mental health has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and features prominently across recovery in the short and long term. The public health team are developing a mental health strategy to underpin work happening locally to promote and support good mental health. Developed as a partnership approach, 'Darlington Connected' will have three main aims:
  - (a) To standardise communication and promotion of good mental health
  - (b) Training and workforce development across the system
  - (c) Connecting people to the range of services and activities that are available locally that support good mental health
15. I also undertook a visit to the Neasham Road Caravan Site, where I engaged with members of the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community, sharing public health messages and I intent to create a regular forum for feedback.

## **Health and Well Being Board**

16. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. The main discussion item was the Darlington response to the COVID-19 pandemic with contributions from each Board member reflecting on how it has impacted on service users. The Board received a presentation from the COVID-19 Health Protection Board providing an update on the delivery of the Local Outbreak Control Plan.
17. Representatives of local NHS provider services and Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group provided updates to the Board on their preparations for Winter demand, seasonal flu vaccination programme and the local response to the directive from Sir Simon Stevens. "Implementing phase 3 of the NHS response to the COVID-19 pandemic" (August 2020).
18. As chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board I have asked for feedback on how the board operates. Members of the board will soon receive a survey to complete which will focus on what we do well, what we would like to change, and general feedback from partners about our setup.

## **Housing Services**

### **Universal Credit**

19. Our Housing Income Team have continued to provide a pro-active and supportive stance in relation to rent arrears throughout these difficult times. This has produced good results with the arrears levels at a lower level than this time last year and slightly less than national levels for arrears. This is despite the number of our tenants receiving Universal Credit (UC) continuing to increase with nearly 25% of customer now in receipt of UC.
20. The team focus has been particularly to help our tenants to make affordable repayment plans and to manage and prioritise their Universal Credit payments to ensure priority debts, are paid. It has been especially important for the team to offer digital support throughout this time to help tenants access their digital tenancies and to access their on-line Universal Credit journals to report changes and any problems to the DWP, to ensure that payments reflect their current circumstances.
21. The team have collected over £8.6M since April and have also continued to assist tenants in making applications to Northumbrian Water for their Social Tariff funding, which has meant that since April, nearly £23K has been awarded to Council tenants to help reduce their water rates bills.

### **Digital Tenancy Portal**

22. The Digital Tenancy portal remains active to tenants and work is progressing on testing and implementing new features of the portal, such as allowing tenants to book their own appointments and set up a direct debit. The portal enables tenants to access their housing account to check their current rent balance, make online payments, report repairs, send messages and view and print their rent statements. It is accessible 24/7 using a smartphone, tablet or laptop/PC. It reduces the need for phone calls and wait times and there is no need to visit

customer services for those transactions.

## **New Build Housing**

23. The Council's latest new build affordable housing development at Mickleton Close, Lascelles Park is now fully complete. The latest scheme has seen the construction of 12 two-bedroom houses and two three-bedroom homes to compliment an earlier new build scheme on this site of two bedroomed apartments and family homes. This is part of a long term commitment to build more affordable homes for rent to meet the needs of local people and our vision to build strong and balanced communities, making sure properties are available for families as well as older people and those in most need.
24. Our new properties have been very popular, with demand for all the developments far outstripping supply. The feedback from the new tenants at the viewings for the new homes at Mickleton Close was that they were very impressed with the standard of the properties and the room sizes were much larger than expected
25. Work is also currently underway on phase two of Lancaster Close, Darlington which is due to complete in late 2021.

## **Homelessness**

26. Homeless presentations and requests for support and assistance from our Housing Options Team continues to be high as a result of the government commitment during the pandemic that anyone who presents as homeless, regardless of their need, is placed in emergency accommodation. Accommodation is in the form of temporary homeless accommodation, emergency supported accommodation, out of area placements and where necessary hotel accommodation. 173 households were placed in Bed and Breakfast and emergency accommodation in the first quarter 20/21 compared to 91 in the same period last year but we have now increased the availability of temporary accommodation to provide improved outcomes.
27. Our approach is shaped by the belief that every person matters, and can, with the appropriate support, move from rough-sleeping into long-term, sustainable, accommodation.

## **Lifeline Services**

28. Our Lifeline Team have worked throughout the pandemic to ensure that there have been a range of activities available to the tenants living in the sheltered and extra care complexes. The focus has been on maintaining wellbeing and mental health but the approach has needed to ensure that delivery of activities is COVID safe.
29. This identified a need to have better access to digital devices that tenants can use to stay engaged and access a range of services remotely. Generous donations of second-hand devices have been greatly appreciated but thanks to the Government's Infection Control Fund, £5000 has now been allocated to Lifeline Services to procure 40 mobile tablets. A further allocation has been made directly to the care provider operating in our Extra Care Schemes so both services are working closely together to maximise the overall availability of digital devices. These will enable residents to access virtual appointments with GP's and hospitals,

engage with family, access key websites and use digital services and for development of learning, skills and hobbies.

30. I have also undertaken a visit to our lifeline teams, where I thanked them for their hard work over lockdown.

## **Eastbourne Sports Complex**

### **Outdoor Classes**

31. Our Move More Team have started an outdoor programme at Eastbourne Sports Complex to encourage participants back into classes. The sessions have been delivered safely following the government guidelines and have ranged from walking groups, to Keep Fit and HIIT classes with a total of 10 classes per week. The classes have been extremely popular with over 80 people attending each week.

### **Sheltered Housing Project**

32. Our Move More Team have started to deliver socially distanced outdoor sessions to the residents in the sheltered housing schemes. The gentle exercise sessions are offered to all residents and follow the government guidelines on outdoor exercise.

### **Tackling Inequalities Fund**

33. With the support of Tees Valley Sport, the Darlington Move More Team have successfully supported Breathe Easy Darlington, Red Hall Community Association, Groundworks North East, Sporting Force and Darlington Table Tennis Academy in securing funding from Sport England Inequalities Fund.
34. Each charity/club is responding to the direct impact of the lockdown on the people who access their services for support and a total of £15,000 has been awarded to help them to do this. Activities range from setting up walking groups, to outdoor family exercise sessions, to Mental Health and wellbeing support to rebuild confidence.

### **The Dolphin Centre**

35. As part of the phased recovery, the Dolphin Centre opened for public swimming and gym use on 27 July. Access for residents is based on a booking system with maximum capacities in line with government and national governing body guidance. The availability of these services has been very welcomed by customers and feedback around safety on site has been excellent.
36. The pool programme began with adult lane swimming, swimming club usage and water-based classes. The introduction of weekend family swimming was introduced on Saturday 15 August, with further programme developments taking place throughout September.
37. In week three of the gym reopening the programme was extended to include inductions for new customers and new members to use the facility.

38. September also saw the Dolphin Centre revert to operating times that were very close to normal operating, which again was very welcomed by customers.
39. Catering services are now fully open with the Bistro and Pavement Café operating along with 16 Horsemarket, which is accessible as a wet weather option. Again, capacity is limited to reinforce the 2-metre social distancing and safe working practices. The introduction of the “Eat Out to Help Out” on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday during August was very popular with customers.
40. On the 10 August customers were welcomed back to access some limited badminton court usage on weekday afternoons with Dolphin Premier Badminton Club on site from 30 August. A programme of exercise classes were introduced in early September, including: Spinning, Circuits, Pilates and Tai Chi.
41. Darlington College have delivered a number of courses on site to young adults to develop local employment skills, including: basic computing, health and safety and stewarding qualifications.
42. I visited the team at the Dolphin centre recently, which involved looking at the COVID safe working practices for both colleagues and customers. I also visited the construction site where work is currently underway on the bowling, soft play and M&E project, which is due to complete at the end of November.

**Councillor Kevin Nicholson**  
**Health and Housing Portfolio**