

**COUNCIL
26 NOVEMBER 2020**

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

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:-

Summary

2. There have been some huge changes to our way of life since March and it's fair to say that things have begun to change even more in the last few weeks. These changes have been happening so fast that it can sometimes be hard to keep up with the latest information. I know we all want to do the right thing, so it's vital that we stick together as a town, familiarise ourselves with the new updated regulations, and look out for our communities.
3. COVID-19 case numbers are rising rapidly across the whole of the UK, I have said it before, and it is important to recognise that Darlington residents have been working hard to stick to the rules, this is reflective in our overall numbers. We must not be complacent, the Council will continue to inform, educate and support residents across the borough.

National Lockdown

4. On Thursday 5 November national restrictions replaced the Local Covid Alert Level measures. The new measures will apply nationally for four weeks up to and including Wednesday 2 December. At the end of that period, we will return to a regional approach, based on the latest data.
5. You can view the National Restrictions at www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november
6. These continue to be very difficult times for everyone but I'm confident that if we follow the regulations, we can reduce the numbers affected by the virus and keep Darlington on the right track.
7. These measures will be underpinned by law. Police and other authorities will have powers to give fines and break up gatherings.

Local COVID communications

8. Localised coronavirus messaging, a requirement of the Local Outbreak Control Plan are now in circulation, and have been placed in the One Darlington magazine,

billboards, town centre planters. These have been produced in various languages and have been supported by the Darlington Primary Care Network.

New Director of Public Health

9. The Council have appointed a new Director of Public Health, Penny Spring who commenced her role in early November.

COVID lateral flow tests for Darlington

10. Lateral flow antigen tests are a new kind of technology that can be used to test a higher proportion of asymptomatic people, better enabling us to identify and isolate more people who are at high likelihood of spreading virus, and break the chain of transmission.
11. Darlington will receive a batch of 10,000 antigen lateral flow devices as part of a new pilot to enable us to start testing priority groups, followed by weekly local allocations.
12. 10,000 test kits have been issued to the Director of Public Health, which will enable us to direct and deliver community testing.
13. There is still some work to be done relating to how we strategically deploy these tests, but they will be used in the most effective way possible based on local data.

Darlington Health Protection Board

14. The Darlington Health Protection Board monitors the delivery of the Darlington Local Outbreak Control Plan. The purpose of the Health Protection Board is to lead and co-ordinate work to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks of COVID-19.
15. The Health Protection Board is chaired by the Director of Public Health and includes representation from Education, Environmental Health, Housing, Community Services, Darlington Partnership, Tees Clinical Commissioning Group, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, TEWV, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust and Healthwatch.
16. The Board meets weekly and reviews and shares data and intelligence from a range of different settings, to enable all partners to work together to prevent and control Covid-19 at a population level and in complex settings and communities. The Board is informed about the management of community outbreaks, escalating to the Local Resilience Forum when appropriate.

Public Health

17. The 2020/2021 Healthy Lifestyles Survey has been offered to all schools in the borough and includes questions about Covid19 and its impact on the lives of children and young people. Key themes of the survey will be reported in Spring, 2021.
18. In 2019/20, four projects were funded to provide suicide prevention support in Darlington. All of the projects have faced issues in relation to the lockdown and

work is ongoing to see how needs can continue to be met in these difficult circumstances. MIND was due to deliver face to face training sessions and set up instead a dedicated telephone support service for children, young people and families.

19. ManHealth were delivering face to face groups for men during lockdown and they kept in touch with people needing support via a webchat service and SMS messages as well as a closed Facebook group.
20. Morrisons Trust were in the process of developing Men Shed and employment support and this work, whilst delayed is ongoing, supported by the Care and Share group. Finally, Longfield School have been developing a community garden and volunteers supported this by growing seeds at home during lockdown when schools were closed.

Stop Smoking Service

21. The Stop Smoking Service is offering telephone, face to face and Attend Anywhere appointments.
22. Attend Anywhere is a virtual online system where face to face assessments are carried out with those wishing to quit smoking. The Darlington stop smoking service have a waiting area which clients access via a URL code that is sent to them prior to their first appointment. Clients are sent information so they know what to expect when they arrive in the waiting area. The stop smoking practitioner then enters the Attend Anywhere site and can collect their client from the waiting area to begin their consultation.

Health and Wellbeing Board Survey

23. As part of my vision to transform the way the Health and Wellbeing Board operates, members of the HWBB will soon receive a survey, this has been delayed in part to due to the change of Public Health Director and Coronavirus developments.

Housing Services

Universal Credit

24. Despite the numerous challenges this year has brought so far, the team have enabled the Housing Income team to continue to provide dedicated support to those people who have lost employment, had an income change or claimed Universal Credit. This intensive support and guidance has continued to help residents to be supported in maintaining payment plans and maintaining tenancies, and to date the team have so far collected over £13.2 million towards current tenant rent and arrears. Arrears levels are currently lower than this time last year which demonstrates how effective the support offered has been. Collection rates for current tenants are at 97.1 per cent with rent arrears at the end of Quarter 2 standing at 3.2 per cent which is lower than the same time last year.

Housing Management and Maintenance

25. There have been many challenges for the management and maintenance of our council properties this year. The postponement of gas servicing earlier in the year

due to the lockdown has led to an increase in the number of properties that required their annual gas service safety check.

26. We have ensured these were prioritised as soon as possible resulting in 1449 safety checks being completed between 1 July and 1 October 2020 and the backlog has now been cleared. Alongside this the team ensured that safe systems of working were adhered to and the teams have adapted to the new ways of working. This has resulted in the repairs and maintenance service now running at full capacity.
27. Good progress has also been made in allocating properties. Between the 1 July and the 1 October 2020, 159 properties have been let to a broad section of applicants. Again, safe ways of working have been introduced to keep both residents and staff safe.
28. A new post of Communication and Engagement co-ordinator has been appointed to ensure that tenants are fully involved and consulted on community issues and the services that we provide as a social landlord.
29. The role will encourage more flexible engagement methods using social media and other on-line methods of engagement. It is important for all our tenants to be given every opportunity to actively participate in helping to shape the services we provide, leading to continual improvement.

Lifeline Services

30. Following the relaxation of lockdown rules, Housing and Lifeline Services have continued to signpost and help the most vulnerable tenants. This assistance has aided the more vulnerable of the communities to rebuild their support networks around food, medication and reducing isolation. The teams have liaised closely with community groups to help to meet these needs.
31. As we head into further restrictions, we recognise that some of our tenants in our sheltered, extra care and good neighbour schemes can often feel lonely and isolated. To help us better understand their needs we have arranged for the Lifeline team to survey the tenants to seek their views, enabling us to future-plan their support over the winter period. I will keep Members updated with the feedback I receive.
32. With this in mind, following the successful bid for funding around infection control, we have arranged for 'Unforgettable Experiences' to work in our extra care schemes with some of our most vulnerable tenants, embarking on projects around tenant engagement in digital activities. Once this is embedded it can then be rolled out to our sheltered and good neighbour settings
33. Meanwhile the key role of Lifeline Services continues and over a three-month period we have:
 - Undertaken 2,365 emergency call outs
 - Provided 34,061 welfare calls
 - Worked in partnership with external agencies such as GP's, nurses and other health worker on 6048 occasions

- Installed new Lifeline and Telecare equipment to 134 customers
- Carried out 516 activities in sheltered housing and extra care schemes.

34. I have asked officers to look at the branding and logo of lifeline services, to ensure this valuable service has the recognition and presence it deserves.

Funding Support to Homeless

35. I am pleased to be able to report that the Council has been successful in its bid for funding from the Government from the Next Steps for Rough Sleepers programme. We have received more than £290,000, to be used over the next three years, to help provide a permanent place to live for some of our most vulnerable facing homelessness.

36. A specialist programme will be created within the council's homelessness services, with the aim of providing sustainable housing and independence, and additional support for those who have complex needs and difficulties in moving into long-term accommodation.

37. It will offer intense, personalised, accommodation-based support, 24/7 for up to three years, and be delivered from eight new units of dedicated, self-contained accommodation created by renovating several empty properties in the Northgate area.

38. Work will include addiction and mental ill-health support alongside how to manage a tenancy and how to sustain one, by offering long-term solutions to those with the highest needs aiming to deliver a sustainable reduction in rough sleeping.

Digital Offer

39. The team have helped to improve the digital offer to tenants and customers with the introduction of the "myscan" app which allows customers to scan documents and send these through to Council services without leaving their home.

40. This improvement, along with the planned improvements to the Digital Tenancy app and housing application systems will make it easier for tenants and customers to contact the team 24/7, 365 days a year.

The Dolphin Centre

41. The Dolphin Centre has continued to operate in line with government and national governing body guidance and a best practice approach to all safe systems of work, as of the 5th November and in line with National Lockdown measures the Dolphin Centre has closed.

42. The pool programme introduced family swimming sessions on weekends and evenings in September, which were very popular with customers. Dedicated pool and diving board sessions were also introduced to broaden the appeal to young people in Darlington. The gym also operated a junior gym session to strengthen the offer to young people.

43. Catering services continued to be fully open with the Bistro and Pavement Café operating along with 16 Horsemarket. Again, capacity was limited to reinforce the 2-metre social distancing and safe working practices. A number of offers have been available to encourage customers during this period and once we are able to reopen, we can continue to offer fantastic deals to customers.

44. The fitness class programme expanded further with options of more classes and onsite partner Fitlab have opened the Studio to customers providing greater choice whilst still operating their online offer.
45. Additional clubs and partners began delivery including the table tennis club, Street Swords and the Music Bugs Parent and Toddler group. Darlington Football Club have also reintroduced the educational delivery of the academy programme on site.
46. The Dolphin Centre was delighted to welcome a new partner to the facility in October. Stagecoach Performing Arts operated on Fridays and Saturdays.
47. Work continues on the bowling, soft play and mechanical and electrical project, which is due to complete for December 2020 opening.

Eastbourne Sports Complex

48. The Sports Complex has recovered extremely well during what has been a very challenging time for the site and the community clubs who use the facility. Prior to the National Restrictions, all partners and customers returned to site and the business plan was recovering well.
49. This shows how important having a strategic sports hub facility is, which can play a very important role in improving the health and wellbeing of all of the residents in the Borough.

Outdoor Classes

50. The Move More Team provided a very successful outdoor activity programme at Eastbourne Sports Complex to encourage participants back to classes and to provide a service that wasn't available at the Dolphin Centre due to the indoor COVID-19 restrictions. The sessions ranged from Walking groups to Keep Fit and HIIT classes, with a total of 10 classes over the week. The classes have been extremely popular with over 120 people attending each week.

Tackling Inequalities Fund

51. With the support of Tees Valley Sport, the Darlington Move More Team have supported Firthmoor Community Association, Darlington Association on Disability and Cruse Bereavement Services with applications into the Sport England Inequalities Fund. Each organisation is responding to the direct impact of the lockdown on the people they support and who access their services and a total of £15,800 has been applied for to help them to do this.

Councillor Kevin Nicholson
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing