

COUNCIL 25 MARCH 2021

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Stronger Communities Portfolio.

Community Safety

Purple Flag

2. Darlington was the first town in the North East to be awarded Purple Flag status in January 2020 and more recently successfully completed the re-accreditation process for interim renewal in January 2021. Purple Flag is nationally recognised as those destinations which promote a safe and enjoyable night-out.

Darlington Borough Council COVID Pandemic Prevention and Compliance Group

3. Since the initial outbreak was reported in March 2020, members of the group have dealt with 2,260 reported incidents, completed 1191 checks, provided guidance on 3,161 occasions and taken enforcement action in 249 cases (majority of enforcement relates to police issue of fixed penalty notices for breach of Covid restrictions).

Pavement Cafés

4. Members of Community Safety, the Town Centre Team, Highways and Licensing supported by Cabinet are currently reviewing the approach to Pavement Cafés in Darlington town centre. The group are actively considering several issues around demand and user requirements, accessibility, public safety, implications for highways, licensing arrangements, operational delivery and fees.
5. The work is linked to the Town Centre Recovery Plan and will report April 2021.

Begging

6. Members of Darlington Borough Council, Police and charitable organisations continue to meet bi-monthly to tackle problems associated with begging in Darlington.
7. Since inception in 2018, the group has worked closely with several people with complex needs which has resulted in a low number of presentations on the street.
8. The strategy and associated action plan are now under review and will be refreshed for implementation on 1 April 2021.

Civic Enforcement Service

Back Lanes Project

9. The Back Lanes Project is ongoing, and 40 streets have now been issued with Section 46 legal notices which focus on the responsibilities of householders for the management of waste. Action is taken on failure to adhere to the notice in the form of Community Protection Notice warnings and notices. Early evidence indicates that this approach is proving successful with reduced levels of complaints in targeted streets.

Responsible Dog Ownership Project (Dog Watch)

10. The project is gaining momentum and the group have renamed themselves 'Dog Watch'. The current focus of the group includes:
 - (a) An article has been drafted for the March edition of One Darlington Magazine in relation to dog fouling and health messages associated with failing to clean up after pets.
 - (b) Evaluation of the dog waste bag dispenser's trial.
 - (c) Code of conduct for dog walkers; creating a scheme similar to the Falkirk scheme.
 - (d) Linking with partners in relation to information for the public around a recent national increase in dog thefts.
 - (e) Raise awareness/build intelligence in relation to illegal breeding (linked to above point).
11. The 'We are Watching you' campaign which is designed to prevent fly tipping and dog fouling is now live throughout the Borough.

Anti-Social Behaviour/COVID breaches Multi Storey Car Park

12. Civic Enforcement Officers, Police and CCTV Operatives are currently working together to tackle problems involving skateboarders in the multi storey car park. Groups of young people are visiting the car park, causing nuisance and breaching current COVID legislation. Civic Enforcement have warned, educated and, for repeat offenders, conducted interviews resulting in Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and referrals to the Youth Offending Service for early intervention. Police Officers have issued fines to repeat offenders for COVID breaches.

CCTV

Review of CCTV

13. A review has commenced in relation to the future provision of CCTV in Darlington. A working group involving DBC Cabinet, DBC officers, Police and Fire and Rescue will examine existing provision and develop (with specialist support) a future specification to meet the Council's ambitions and the changing environment for public safety.

14. The initial findings and report are expected in May 2021.

Trading Standards

Investigations

15. On 22 December 2020, Etris Hassan Moulod of Trinity Mews, Thornaby was sentenced to 20 weeks imprisonment suspended for 12 months and ordered to pay costs and a victim surcharge totalling £1,371 after being found guilty at an earlier hearing at Peterlee Magistrates' Court of four offences of possessing to supply counterfeit goods under the Trade Marks Act 1994 and four offences relating to Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015. All the products that were seized were forfeited.
16. Hemin Hussain Mohammed of Wilson Street, Darlington pleaded guilty to one offence of possessing for supply counterfeit cigarettes contrary to the Trade Marks Act 1994 and three charges relating to the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 when he appeared before Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Court on 14th January 2021. He was fined £240 and ordered to pay £706 costs and a £32 victim surcharge. The court also granted a forfeiture of all the products seized.
17. The above cases were brought following an investigation by Trading Standards under Operation Sirenian, aimed at tackling the supply of illegal tobacco in Darlington.

Private Sector Housing

Regulation for Private Landlords

18. The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020 require landlords to have the electrical installations in their properties inspected and tested by a person who is qualified and competent, at least every 5 years. Landlords must provide a copy of the electrical safety report to their tenants, and to their local authority if requested. The regulations are intended to ensure that tenants can enjoy a safer living environment. Since July 1 2020, landlords issuing new tenancy agreements must have an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) carried out. The report must also be given to all tenants, while any remedial work required should be carried out. Private Sector Housing will be promoting that, from 1 April 2021, EICRs will become mandatory for all private tenancies.

Community Resilience

Darlington Open Water Safety Group

19. A new multi-agency working group was convened in March 2021 to complete a risk-based approach of the dangers associated with open water and develop a series of actions to mitigate "high risk" areas. The group intends to build on work completed in 2020, when a number of staff were trained in water safety site risk assessment.

20. The working group, chaired by the Head of Community Safety, includes representatives from Community Safety, Law and Governance, Highways, Environmental Services, Health and Safety and Estates departments, in addition to external colleagues from the Police, Fire and Rescue and North East Ambulance Service.

Home Office Violence and Vulnerability Group - County Lines Locality Review

21. The County Lines Locality Review was held virtually on 10 February 2021. There were 55 attendees representing a range of organisations working in Darlington. Seven separate themed workshops were facilitated by the Violence and Vulnerability Unit staff.
22. A 'hot debrief' was held immediately following the completion of the workshops and an interim report sent to key individuals. The hot debrief highlighted that, overall, the outcome was extremely positive and reflected the passion, professionalism and determination of all concerned in making Darlington a better and safer place.
23. The full report will be made available to DBC within 10 working days of the review and the recommendations will then be considered by a multi-agency group.
24. The Community Resilience Officer is currently developing a County Lines training package which will be available for DBC staff in April 2021.

Road Safety Scheme for Schools

25. COVID-19 restrictions continue to impact on the delivery of the scheme. Funding has been secured from Durham Police Crime and Victim Commissioner to purchase branded high-visibility jackets, banners for roadways and the 'Road Safety Great Britain' packs all of which will be made available to schools when restrictions allow.

Community Engagement

26. The Community Resilience Officer is maintaining contact with Arcus (LGBTQ+), Darlington Association on Disability and the UNITY group via e-mails/telephone calls and information from Police Community Cohesion Officers.

UNITY Group

27. The Community Resilience Officer is working with Andy Whittam (DBC Young People's Involvement and Opportunities Worker) to develop a UNITY youth group as there is no direct representation from young people on the current UNITY group.

CONTEST

28. Community Safety are currently working with colleagues in Child and Adult Services and Police to consider recent changes in CONTEST which is the government's response to counter-terrorism in the UK.

29. The reforms include the transfer of statutory responsibilities to local authorities, the delivery of the CHANNEL programme, the development of the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP), the delivery of the County Durham and Darlington Silver Contest Board Strategic Delivery Plan, training for partners, staff and Members, increased public engagement, security in crowded places and increased levels of scrutiny for local authorities.
30. The revised framework will be implemented April 2021.
31. The first meeting of DBC Counter Terrorism Local Champions took place on Wednesday 17 March 2021. The meeting included national and local updates, continuous professional development activities and the opportunity for champions to share their experiences and suggest how to improve engagement within DBC and beyond.
32. No Tension Monitoring Reports have been received during the period of this report.

Eyes and Ears

33. Although COVID restrictions continue to impact on the delivery of the project, joint virtual briefings with the Police on 'Confidence Academy' and Eyes and Ears were delivered to Councillors on 27 January 2021 and 10 Feb 2021. 23 Members attended and the presentations / schemes were well received.

Home Office Safer Streets Fund

34. Safer Streets is a Home Office initiative designed to reduce residential burglaries through target-hardening measures.
35. Following the launch of the scheme in Northgate and North Road, Darlington on 7 September 2020, 331 premises have received a visit from a Police Community Support Officer, 32 properties have had all safer streets works completed, 48 are part completed and 14 properties remain outstanding.
36. In anticipation of surplus funding (due to a reduced number of burglary dwelling) an additional bid for funding was submitted to the Home Office to support tackling environmental crime, defensive planting, CCTV, crime prevention packs, home security cameras, engagement activity and targeted advertising. This bid was successful and awarded £112,000.

Licensing

37. A new Taxi Policy was approved by Full Council and implemented on the 1 January 2021. This policy incorporated all the new Statutory Standards required by the Department for Transport. It will also see the introduction of an age restriction for vehicles after April 2023 to ensure they will be compliant with Euro 6 engine emissions. This is in line with a regional approach by Local Authorities to help reduce harmful emissions.
38. Darlington's Licensing Act Policy was due to be reviewed by January 2021 however, concerns were expressed nationally that with the closure of many licensed premises it is impossible to adequately consult with the hospitality industry.

A delay until April 2021 was approved by the Licensing Committee on the 28 July 2020. Since this decision, with the introduction of a tier system and subsequent lockdown due to COVID-19, it has been impossible to consult with the hospitality trade, so Licensing will seek approval for the current policy to be carried over until such a time that meaningful consultation with the trade can take place. This pragmatic approach has been suggested by the Home Office as a solution to what remains a legal requirement under the Licensing Act 2003.

39. A new on-line taxi licensing application system (IDOX) has commenced the testing phase and implementation is anticipated for early spring. A small number of IT and Licensing staff have been trained by IDOX for them to cascade to other team members. In addition to this, an electronic workflow monitor called Enterprise will be introduced to manage all licensing applications with greater speed and efficiently.
40. There has been recent national media attention given to the increase in dog breeding activities as a means of making money for people during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This activity also exploits those seeking a dog as a companion whilst in lockdown. Licensing have been working with partners to establish the intelligence picture of dog breeding in Darlington, to develop a coordinated strategy should any issues be identified.

Crime and Disorder

41. There has been an 18 per cent reduction in the number of reported crimes in Darlington during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 January 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. This equates to a decrease of 1911 crimes. The only crime showing an increase is Arson (17 crimes). All other categories of crime are showing a significant decrease.
42. There has been a 1 per cent increase in the number of reported anti-social behaviour incidents in Darlington during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 January 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. This equates to an increase of 43 incidents. Incidents showing an increase include Alcohol related ASB and Drugs related ASB.
43. There has been a 57 per cent reduction in the number of reported crimes in Darlington Town Centre during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 January 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. This equates to a decrease of 860 crimes. All crimes are showing a significant decrease.
44. There has been a 55 per cent reduction in the number of reported anti-social behaviour incidents in the Town Centre during this period compared to the same period in 2019/20 and this equates to 217 incidents.

Progress Against the Council's Equality Objective

45. The objective agreed for the period 2018-22 is :-

“To remind all Members and staff of their duties under the Equality Act 2010, demonstrate how the council has done this via training and engagement with services users and support organisations, and publicise the differences that this work has made.”

46. A training programme is now underway which was launched in January 2020, with the intention of training all staff and Councillors over a two-year period. The half day sessions were initially delivered in person, these are now being delivered via Teams to those staff who are able to access online training, due to Covid-19. Since the start of the training programme to the end of January 2021, 733 members of staff have received a half day of Equality training, representing 43 per cent of staff. Training for Councillors was split into two sessions; 58 per cent of Councillors have attended at least one session. Of the attendees of the sessions, 61 per cent said they would change the way they approach Equality and Diversity as a result of the training.
47. An accelerated in person training is being planned for staff who cannot access Teams once it is safe to be delivered. An additional specific module on Equality Impact Assessments and ensuring the Public Sector Equality Duty is considered in decision making, is currently being rolled out to relevant staff.

Climate Change

48. Funding for the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme is due to be submitted on 26 March 2021. The primary purpose of the LAD scheme is to raise the energy efficiency rating of low income and low Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rated homes (those with E, F or G).
49. The LAD Scheme aims to deliver energy efficiency upgrades to low income and low energy efficiency rated homes, including those living in the worst quality off-gas grid homes. Funds under this scheme will enable Local Authorities to support low-income, fuel-poor households in their local area.
50. Funding will therefore be shared across all tenures and housing providers with properties in the Private Sector, those rented and owner occupied, being targeted where there are known low EPC ratings and high levels of fuel poverty.

**Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Stronger Communities Portfolio/
Deputy Leader of the Council**