

COUNCIL
25 MARCH 2021

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: -

Overview

2. A national lockdown for England continues to be in effect. On 22 February 2021 the Prime Minister set out roadmap to cautiously ease lockdown restrictions.
3. The roadmap, which has been published on gov.uk outlines four steps for easing restrictions. Before proceeding to the next step, the Government will examine the data to assess the impact of previous steps.

This assessment will be based on four tests:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
 - Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
 - Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
 - Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.
4. The rate of infection in Darlington has shown a sustained reduction since the beginning of January 2021. The current rate is now similar to that of the beginning of October 2020.
 5. The data from Public Health England indicates that the new variant is now the most common variant in new cases in Darlington
 6. The latest hospital data showing a decrease in hospital bed occupancy with patients with COVID -19. The numbers of those in ITU have shown a decrease across County Durham and Darlington Trust compared to previous weeks. The numbers of new patients admitted as emergencies with COVID 19 has also continued to show a decrease
 7. Overall, the numbers of deaths are higher than the five-year average for January although there have been several weeks where the death rate has been lower. Darlington continues to have the lowest overall rates in the North East.

8. Our 'Keep Darlington on the right track' campaign continues to evolve with adverts running across various social media platforms, helping to engage with a range of audiences. Our response based on the relevant public health data we review weekly. Information was also advertised in the March edition of the One Darlington magazine.

Community Testing

9. As of 16 March 2020, the Council had undertaken 25,757 community tests across all our sites in the borough. I continue to urge all Members to do everything they can to help drive uptake of appointments across all our community sites.
10. Community testing for asymptomatic people started on 14 December 2020 at the Dolphin Centre and then rolled out to five community sites at Firthmoor Community Centre, Head of Steam Railway Museum, Heighington Village Hall, Middleton St George Community Centre and Red Hall Community Centre on 11 January 2021. A site was also opened at the Council Depot to provide regular testing for operational staff.
11. Darlington's community testing programme is leading the way not only in the North-East, but in the UK. Our efforts are helping to interrupt community transmission of COVID-19 and is helping to protect communities right across Darlington.
12. I was delighted that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care recently acknowledged Darlington's great work in response to the pandemic and commended our community testing programme.
13. There are currently 160 staff involved in the community testing programme mainly drawn from Dolphin Centre and Hippodrome whilst those facilities have been closed.
14. As the testing environment continues to develop and the country works through the road map to reopening, testing being a key element of this journey, we will need to adapt and evolve our approach to accommodate both public behaviour changes and staffing challenges that will be presented as we progress.
15. All schools have been providing students and staff with regular lateral flow tests since the beginning of term on 8 March as part of the actions to keep staff and pupils safe in school and support learning. There have been a range of other testing programmes launched to support more people to have regular tests to support the exit from lockdown. This includes employers undertaking their own Workplace Testing and Community Collect Testing which allows individuals and families to collect test kits and undertake their own tests at home.

Community Collect

16. Community Collect is a new channel where members of the public can pick up self-test kits from Community Test Sites in Darlington. Community Collect enables twice-weekly testing kits to be used at home.
17. The introduction of self-test, where people can carry out rapid lateral flow tests themselves at home or where they work, will significantly expand asymptomatic

testing, building on the capability that has already been established through community asymptomatic test sites and national workplace testing.

COVID-19 Vaccinations

18. I was delighted to observe the opening of Darlington's mass vaccination centre at Mowden Park Rugby Club on 1 March, this was fourth Vaccination Centre for our region and the first in Tees Valley.
19. This site is part of the national network of mass vaccination sites and will be available to local residents as well as people from surrounding areas. Those in the wider population cohorts of younger aged adults are now receiving their notification for their appointments for vaccination.
20. Large Vaccination Centres can see up to 1,000 patients a day, running 12 hours a day, seven days a week.
21. The vaccination programme in Darlington continues to progress well with 94 per cent of all those aged 70 or over now having received their first dose of the vaccine.
22. Council teams continue to support the NHS and PCN. Our Council team have been supporting the vaccination site at Feethams House with the organisation of volunteers, parking arrangements and have provided several call centre staff to support local residents with booking vaccine appointments over the telephone.
23. There is now a wide range of data available regarding National vaccination progress on the NHS website: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-vaccinations/>

Public Health

24. In the next couple of months Healthwatch Darlington will be distributing 200 suicide prevention tins on behalf of the Council as part of the regional roll out. These tins will be placed in a range of venues including foodbanks, schools, colleges, primary care and with large employers.
25. The tins contain information to support people who need help themselves in relation to suicidal thoughts or who have family or friends they are concerned about. Alongside the distribution, key contacts in the venues will be asked to undertake a 20-minute training session. This will provide them with the tools and confidence to have difficult conversations around suicide. The training is free and open to everyone and the link is: https://www.relias.co.uk/hubfs/ZSA-FullTraining-10012020/story_html5.htm
26. Work is underway to get MECC (Make Every Contact Count) training implemented through the Council workforce. This will be done via Academy 10, Workforce Development and Customer Services with a view that interactions with members of the public can be used as opportunities to promote wellbeing and individualized signposting.
27. This training will also be offered to voluntary sector organisations to reach a wider audience and more beneficiaries.

Health and Wellbeing Board

28. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on the 18 March 2021. The main discussion item was an update on the COVID-19 local outbreak. This discussion was informed by a presentation by the Director of Public Health which outlined some key data describing the impact of the pandemic on local communities in Darlington.

Darlington PING! 2021 Table Tennis Project

29. Darlington Move More Team has been successful with a £2500 application to deliver a new PING! 2021 Table Tennis project. The programme will use table tennis to remove barriers to physical activity, inspire behaviour change and deliver positive outcomes. The team has acquired three new outdoor tables and a full programme will be in place from April 2021 targeting families, offering over 50 sessions and adding into the Eastbourne Sports Complex membership offer, alongside the track and gym, and be utilised as part of the Darlington Move More Team outdoor activity programme.

Darlington Move More Team Virtual Classes

30. The Darlington Move More Team have offered virtual classes to encourage existing and new participants to stay active during the lockdown period. The classes have been extremely popular and are vitally important in such a challenging time. Classes have been offered in Keep Fit, Yoga and Pilates.

Darlington Rugby League Project

31. The Darlington Move More Team has been successful in gaining £2000 to develop a new Rugby League Club at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The project will involve working in partnership with Darlington Rugby League Club, Darlington School Sports Partnership and the Rugby Football League Development Officer. We will deliver Rugby League Activity at Eastbourne Sports Complex working in partnership with the local cluster of schools in the Stephenson Ward of Darlington.

Housing Services

Tenancy Policy 2020-2025

32. Cabinet has approved the Tenancy Policy 2020-2025 which has been updated to ensure that Housing Services make best use of the Council owned stock; to target Council housing for those in most need; and to ensure that properties continue to meet resident's needs.
33. The policy has been updated to amend flexible tenancies to apply to properties that have been extensively adapted and to properties in areas of regeneration. This will allow Housing Services to ensure the properties and adaptations continue to meet resident's needs and reduce homes that have been highlighted for regeneration standing empty for longer than necessary.

Housing Management and Maintenance

34. Customer Engagement is a high priority for Housing. Part of the digital inclusion strategy for Housing is the introduction of the Facebook page, where we can keep

residents up to date with services, good news stories and details of local events. The page went live just before Christmas and has over 500 followers, which is approximately 10 per cent of our current stock.

35. Gas servicing and repairs to Council properties continue to be facilitated throughout the Pandemic, ensuring the safety of Council tenants' is paramount. All employees are continuing to wear PPE and maintain safe working procedures when entering tenants' homes to provide additional protection
36. We are currently looking for people to join our tenants board. The tenants board are consulted on any key changes that the housing team want to make and are an important part of ensuring we do right for all our tenants. People interested are encouraged to email the housing team: customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk

Housing Income

37. Our arrears recovery process has continued to provide a balanced style of support and enforcement and has continued to prove successful. Current rent arrears have continued to reduce and are lower than this time last year, the national average in January 2021 was 3.69 per cent compared to our figures which are 2.9 per cent with over £21.6 million having been collected since April 2020. The number of tenants claiming Universal Credit has continued to increase however, average arrears for these customers is still less than five weeks, indicating how this approach has supported customers throughout these difficult times.

Lifeline Services

38. Following a successful bid for funding through the infection control fund, the Lifeline Team have continued to roll out the delivery of iPads to our sheltered and extra care schemes to support the tenants around social isolation. The iPads help support the activities and communication within the schemes.
39. Over the last month these devices helped facilitate:
 - 50 video calls to family and friends.
 - 3 digital tenancy sign ups.
 - 100 puzzle pages.
 - Promoted keeping active with some tenants logging their pedometers to devices and doing step challenges in the schemes.
 - Tenants can use them to liaise with their GP for consultations where needed.
40. They have proved invaluable and will be increasingly promoted and used throughout the schemes and while some tenants were a bit apprehensive about technology at the beginning, are now using them and finding them a helpful tool.

Housing Options

41. Over the course of the last couple of months, there have been several severe weather warnings, meaning we have needed to follow Severe Weather Emergency Protocol to ensure that anyone presenting as homeless is provided with emergency accommodation to prevent them rough sleeping in adverse weather conditions.

42. Since the first weather warning week commencing 21 December 2020, we have placed 59 individuals and families into temporary accommodation, with 43 of them still being provided with accommodation. We have had some positive move ons: Four individuals have been granted introductory tenancies with the Council, four individuals have moved into supported accommodation and two individuals have secure tenancies in the private sector.
43. We are currently putting together a bid for the next round of Rough Sleeper Initiative funding. We are looking at the funding application on both an individual approach from Darlington Borough Council and with our regional partners to ensure we can enhance our existing provisions and bridge the gaps around support for those with mental health conditions.

Energy Efficiency/Climate Change

44. As member will be aware, we have set aside £1M of Housing Revenue Account funding to put us in a strong position to bid for any future government grants which may require match funding. We have been successful in securing funding as part of round 1 of the Local Authority Delivery (LAD 1) for energy efficiency improvements. This work will include thermal efficient UPVC windows and improved insulation works.
45. In addition, the Tees Valley Combined Authority has secured regional funding on our behalf under the LAD 2 programme for all five local authority areas. This will include development funds to support data quality improvements as well as physical improvements to our Council housing stock
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Councillor Kevin Nicholson
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing