

COUNCIL – MEETING CANCELLED 13 MAY 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

Darlington Borough Council COVID Pandemic Prevention and Compliance Group

2. Since the initial outbreak was reported in March 2020, members of the group have dealt with 3953 reported incidents, completed 1244 checks, provided guidance on 4817 occasions and taken enforcement action in 396 cases (majority of enforcement relates to police issue of fixed penalty notices for breach of COVID restrictions).
3. The Prevention and Compliance Group are now primarily focused on the government roadmap to promote and support a safe and productive economic recovery.

Civic Enforcement Service

Back Lanes Project

4. The Civic Enforcement team continue to evaluate the success of the Back Lanes Project, with evidence indicating that complaints have reduced in targeted streets. 57 streets have now been issued with Section 46 legal notices, which focus on the responsibilities of householders for the management of waste.
5. Action is taken on failure to adhere to the notice in the form of Community Protection Notice warnings. Although a number of Community Protection Notices have been issued, there has generally been good compliance with the Section 46 notices issued.

Trading Standards

6. Trading Standards is participating in the national 'Tick Box: Keep it Real. Keep it Legal' project, which aims to implement a code of practice across the self-storage industry. The code aims to:
 - (a) Prevent the storage of counterfeit and other illicit goods at self-storage facilities.
 - (b) Reduce the appeal of self-storage facilities to criminals.
 - (c) Increase engagement between the industry, Trading Standards and other law enforcement agencies.

7. Trading Standards is in the process of contacting self-storage businesses in Darlington to take the project forward.

Private Sector Housing

8. A funding proposal for the Local Authority Delivery (LAD2) was submitted in March 2021. The proposed scheme aims to deliver energy efficiency upgrades to support 95 properties, with funding of up to £10,000 of measures to low income and low energy efficiency rated homes. 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).
9. Funding will be shared across all tenures and housing providers with properties in the Private Sector, those rented and owner occupied. The delivery plan for the programme will commence following a contract being entered into with our delivery partner.
10. Marketing engagement will commence as soon as possible after the contract is completed, with a campaign to promote and communicate the project to relevant households being targeted where there are known low EPC ratings and high levels of fuel poverty. This marketing activity will continue with targeted campaigns throughout the duration of the project.
11. The project is due to have all installations complete by 31 December 2021.

Community Resilience

Darlington Open Water Safety Group

12. The multi-agency working group, chaired by the Head of Community Safety, commenced fortnightly meetings in March 2021. Considerable progress has been achieved including an assessment of existing control measures at Broken Scar which was completed on 22nd March 2021. This resulted in temporary signage being erected at Broken Scar Picnic Site and at four key locations along the river prior to the school holiday period.
13. An assessment of other key areas was completed by the Community Resilience Officer on 26th March 2021. These locations were identified following analysis of data focussing on water safety incidents within the last 5 years (data provided by County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service). Suggested remedial actions have been provided to the working group for further action.
14. The work around water safety is further supported by table-top exercises, press / media campaigns, involvement of education, targeted patrols at vulnerable locations and the development of a Water Safety Strategy.

Road Safety Scheme for Schools

15. Large vinyl advice / warning banners and 50 junior road safety packs have now been received. The DBC Road Safety Officer has been in contact with the schools involved in the pilot to gauge their views on implementing the scheme, with four schools requesting they receive delivery of the banners immediately to enable them to display these at their school gates. Most schools have asked that the scheme

launch be delayed until September (in the next school year) due to current workload and COVID restrictions preventing effective 'patrols' being carried out by teachers and pupils.

Darlington Association on Disability (DAD)

16. DAD have agreed to their logo being included on the Hidden Disabilities customer service brief distributed to Darlington businesses in April / May 2021. This brief and an associated 'test of knowledge' quiz has been developed by the Community Resilience Officer and Town Centre Partnership and Events Manager as part of the Purple Flag initiative during which DBC highlighted the lack of criteria for town centres to comply with in relation to disability. Some promotional items will also be provided to the shops and DBC is focussing on yellow flowers this year, where possible, in its displays (the Hidden Disabilities' logo is a sunflower).

PREVENT

17. A CONTEST (Counter-Terrorism) Silver Board was held on 24 March 2021. The new Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) which highlights potential threat, risk and mitigation in our communities was agreed at the meeting. The actions and associated plans will be monitored and reviewed by DBC Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee.
18. The initial meeting of the DBC Counter Terrorism Champions was held on 17 March 2021. There are currently eight champions who will meet on a quarterly basis and following a recent suggestion it is intended to extend the group to include designated safeguarding leads from Darlington secondary schools.
19. The National Prevent Referral Form will be adopted by Darlington (and Durham) in mid-May at the request of the Special Branch Prevent Team. The Community Resilience Officer is currently working with the DBC 'front door' to ensure this implementation is successful.

This form will enable professionals to submit referrals using a standard template in preparation for the referral system moving to an online portal system in the future.

20. No Tension Monitoring Reports have been received during the period of this report.

Home Office Safer Streets Fund

21. Launched in Darlington on 7 September 2020, the qualifying criteria was expanded due to fewer than average burglaries as a result of COVID-19 and now includes residential burglaries backdated to 1 June 2020:
 - (a) There has been a total of 16 residential burglaries in Darlington (6 of these are backdated).
 - (b) A total of 416 homes have been visited by Police Community Support officers.
 - (c) 110 homes have accepted the offer of safer streets interventions.
 - (d) 66 properties have been completed, 18 properties are currently having work undertaken and 26 other properties are awaiting target-hardening measures.

22. In anticipation of surplus funds, a meeting was held with local councillors, police and local authority officers to determine additional preventative measures that could be introduced in the targeted area during the short-term. Measures agreed included removal of graffiti, provision of skips, defensive toppings, trellis and defensive planting, CCTV, crime prevention packs (locks, lights, alarms etc.), internal CCTV wi-fi surveillance and replacement gates.
23. Following support from the Home Office, these measures are now being rolled-out in the Northgate and North Road areas of Darlington.

Licensing

Pavement Cafes

24. In line with the requirements of the emergency Business and Planning Act 2020, allowing the hospitality trade to maximise the use of outside space, Darlington's Licensing Committee have approved a streamlined response for pavement café applications to reduce the processing time. This will allow those businesses with outside space to re-open, whilst complying with COVID-19 regulations. Licensing have been working with partners to maximise the space available for premises to trade whilst maintaining public safety. A letter providing information and links to guidance has been produced and published to assist the licensed trade during this transition period.

Taxis

25. The taxi trade has been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 restrictions and Licensing have been assisting our business team to identify and verify taxi drivers who are able to take advantage of the Additional Restriction Grant (ARG) scheme. This has been widely publicised within the trade and those eligible drivers are entitled to claim a grant of £500 as a one-off payment for self-employment support. At the time of reporting, of the 418 drivers who are able to make a claim, 199 have taken advantage of the scheme.

Dog Breeding

26. Licensing currently have two active investigations on-going into unlicensed dog breeding activities, both of which are linked to cross border organised crime. An individual currently under investigation appealed the decision of Licensing not to grant a dog breeders licence, however, the appeal judge upheld the decision and dismissed this appeal. This person was given no right of further appeal unless there is a point of law and to date no further appeal has been made.

Online Taxi Applications

27. Testing of the new online taxi licensing application system identified some issues that were subsequently found to be with the supplier. These are currently being rectified before the system is to be adopted. As a result of this, there has been some slippage in the project. The 'Enterprise' electronic workflow monitor - developed to manage all licensing applications with greater speed and efficiency - has been working well during the testing phase and will hopefully be delivered

within our spring timeline.

Crime and Disorder

28. There has been a 19 per cent reduction in the number of reported crimes in Darlington during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. This equates to a decrease of 2410 crimes. The only crimes showing an increase are Arson (5 crimes) and Rape (2 crimes). All other categories of crime are showing a significant decrease.
29. There has been a 1 per cent decrease in the number of reported anti-social behaviour incidents in Darlington during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. This equates to a decrease of 40 incidents. Incidents showing an increase are Alcohol related ASB (44 incidents).
30. There has been a 58 per cent reduction in the number of reported crimes in Darlington Town Centre during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. This equates to a decrease of 1107 crimes. The only crime showing an increase is Burglary (4 crimes).
31. There has been a 59 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 312 incidents.

Climate Change

32. The delivery of the LAD2 programme supports the aims of the Authority's Climate Change Action Plan of improving energy efficiency, decarbonising heat and will help to reduce the carbon footprint of the Borough.

**Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Stronger Communities Portfolio**