

## **COUNCIL – MEETING CANCELLED**

### **13 MAY 2021**

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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:-

### **Overview**

2. From 8 March, restrictions in England started to lift and the government's four-step roadmap commenced as planned.
3. The roadmap, which has been published on gov.uk since February outlines the four steps for easing restrictions.
4. Step 2 commenced on 12 April which allowed the opening of non-essential retail; personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons; and public buildings, including libraries and community centres. Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms also reopen.
5. You are able meet up outdoors with friends and family you do not live with, either in a group of up to 6 from any number of households (children of all ages count towards the limit of 6) or in a group of any size from up to two households (each household can include an existing support bubble, if eligible).
6. Schools and other education settings opened to all students again on 8 March for the first time since February.
7. The rate of infection in Darlington has been on a reducing trajectory since the peak at the beginning of January 2021. Rates have reduced across all ages but have reduced particularly quickly in those over 60 years.
8. There has been no reports of any Variants of Concern (VOC) being detected in Darlington with the majority of infections in Darlington being attributed to the most common variant.
9. The latest hospital data shows low levels of hospital bed occupancy with patients with COVID-19 including those in ITU. The numbers of new patients admitted as emergencies with COVID-19 has also continued to show a decrease.

### **COVID Communications**

10. 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 has also been advertised in the May edition of the One Darlington magazine.

11. The 'Don't Bring It Home' campaign ran from February to March, across Facebook and Instagram, with a billboard advertisement located near Sainsbury's in Darlington town centre which is still on display. The digital advert gained 17,597 impressions from Darlington residents, which encouraged residents to book regular community tests to keep their families/households safe, particularly if they could not work from home.
12. The 'Teens are not immune to Covid-19' campaign ran in March and April, targeting teens aged 14 and above as well as parents of teens via multiple digital channels and digital radio. The YouTube advert gained 40,045 impressions, Snapchat advert gained 161,535 impressions, Facebook/Instagram advert for teens gained 234,772 impressions and the Facebook/Instagram advert for parents gained 127,541 impressions.

### **Community Testing**

13. Darlington's community testing programme continues to lead 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.
14. The local Community Testing programme for Darlington residents who are asymptomatic continues to provide Lateral Flow Tests across the designated sites across the Borough.
15. As of 29 April 2020, the Council had undertaken 29,361 community tests across all our community sites in the borough. 382 individuals testing positive who did not have symptoms. This corresponds to a positivity rate of 1.3 per cent. The percentage of returning visitors is 46.1 per cent.
16. Schools in Darlington have been providing Lateral Flow Testing to all staff in primary and secondary settings but and those pupils and students in year 7 and above. There have been over 38,502 LFTs undertaken in schools since the 8 March.
17. In this period there have been a total of 93 positive tests reported through the school testing programme.
18. There continues to be no evidence of any sustained outbreak of COVID-19 in pupils and students in any school or college in Darlington and almost all cases reported in school have been linked to exposure outside of school.

### **Community Collect**

19. The government has announced a significant expansion of testing in England to support the roadmap for the easing of restrictions. Anyone will be able to access a free rapid lateral flow test for themselves and their families to use twice a week in line with current clinical guidance.
20. Community Collect launched in Darlington on 12 April.

21. This is designed to detect positive cases earlier and allow interventions such as isolation and contact tracing to be implemented more quickly and better break the chain of transmission and prevent outbreaks.
22. The expanded offer of regular testing offer for people without symptoms will complement the existing Community Testing Programme already successfully delivered by the authority and the school based testing programme and includes:-
  - (a) a home ordering service, which allows people to order lateral flow tests online to be delivered to their home
  - (b) a workplace testing programmes, on-site or at home
  - (c) a collection service at existing local test sites
  - (d) a collection service provided through local community pharmacies.
23. Since the launch of click and collect, the total number of kits collected, as of 3 May, is 1,822 (or 12,754 total tests).

### **COVID-19 Vaccinations**

24. The vaccination programme in Darlington continues to progress well with over 60% of the adult population now received their first dose of the vaccine as of the beginning of May 2021. Those in the most vulnerable JCVI groups are now receiving their second doses of vaccine.
25. In Darlington there have 59,041 of the 92,977 residents aged 16 or older who have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. There are 96.92 per cent of all those aged 70 or over now having received their first dose of the vaccine and over 9 out of 10 of those aged over 65 living in a care home have also been provided with their first dose of vaccine. There have now been 25,212 residents who have received their second and final dose of vaccine.
26. The authority is working with the Clinical Commissioning Group and other authorities across Tees Valley to produce a Tees wide plan to maximise vaccine coverage and ensure that all those vulnerable and hard to reach communities and individuals who have not yet had their vaccine are supported to enable them to receive one.
27. The Primary Care Network worked with the authorities housing services team, the 700 club, YMCA, First Stop and other partners to provide a successful vaccination session for those who were homeless in Darlington.

### **Test and Trace**

28. Test and Trace allows us to find people who have the virus and those they may have infected. Contact tracing is a critical part of the prevention and control of COVID-19. It works alongside other measures, such as limiting social contact, engaging with communities and groups at high risk of getting COVID-19 and enforcing restrictions.
29. Darlington continues to be a Local Tracing Partnership working with NHS Test and Trace nationally and locally to help reach as many people as possible who have tested positive for coronavirus. Individual cases are initially contacted by NHS Test and Trace and then referred to the Local Authority for action and follow up. Once

identified, we advise them to isolate and support them to complete their self-isolation period therefore breaking the chain of infection.

30. One of the benefits of working together is that we receive information about how people are being exposed to the virus, and this is continuously informing our approaches to containing the virus.

## **Public Health**

31. Working alongside the Town Centre Management team and other teams such as the Dolphin Centre and the Library, a Public Health Campaign will run from May to September to increase physical activity in the town centre. The offer includes a Treasure Hunt for families in May half term to get them walking round the town, using local businesses windows to find the answers. The theme will be the Olympics with some factual messaging around healthy eating. There is potential to work with local artist Liz Million to create the artwork and produce some prizes.
32. We will also be using a nudge theory approach to encourage people to move more. We are looking into amending Wayfinding signage and updating any existing signage for COVID-19 to include health messaging. We are hoping to link up to the Feethams car park team, the Cornmill and Queen Street to explore options and costing.
33. To support this, we have been working with the Move More team to launch the "Start my Move More Journey" web page. This will be included in the Healthy Darlington pages and support the residents of Darlington to find ways to be more active in community settings. We have also worked with the Safe in Tees Valley marketing team, who are based in the Town Hall, to ensure our messaging around cycling and walking is correct. This launched in April.
34. I have been working with Planning and Public Health to look at what wider measures might be available to the authority to further contribute to tackling the rates of obesity, particularly in children and young people in our communities. Cabinet has requested the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board explores the merits of adopting the available planning powers through the development of an evidence base and the analysis of good practice elsewhere in the country which will assist in addressing childhood obesity.
35. In this period there have been a total of 115 positive lateral flow tests reported through the school testing programme.
36. There continues to be no evidence of any sustained outbreak of COVID-19 in pupils and students in any school or college in Darlington and almost all cases reported in school have been linked to exposure outside of school.

## **Dolphin Centre**

37. On Monday 12 April, the Dolphin Centre opened its doors again to customers. The pool, gym and pavement café reopened in line with government and governing body guidance. The Centre continues to adhere to best practice in its safe systems of work to ensure customers have confidence in exercising and using the facilities. Leisure Services are also now operating South Park Café, which also opened as a

pavement café on 12 April.

38. A number of partners who deliver children's activities have also returned to the Dolphin Centre, including music bugs, street swords and table tennis club. First Class Learning and Stage Coach are due to restart in May.
39. Preparations are underway to open the new bowling alley on the 21 May and extended soft play on 24 May, alongside indoor hospitality. There has been very encouraging interest from residents in particular around the bowling alley.
40. Some members of the Leisure team continue to support community testing and the vaccine call centre during this period until all business areas are recovered in line with the government roadmap.

### **Holiday Activity Fund**

41. Darlington Borough Council was awarded £488,130 to deliver the Holidays Activities and Food Programme. The purpose of the grant is for local authorities to make free places at holiday clubs available in the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays 2021/2022 to children in their local authority who receive benefits-related free school meals.
42. Five pilot projects were chosen to be delivered at Firthmoor Community Centre, Red Hall Community Centre, Skerne Park Academy, Hummersknott Academy and Eastbourne Sports Complex for Easter. These venues were chosen due to the high-quality infrastructure already in place and the fact the catering could be offered within the short timescale. Following the delivery of the pilot projects, the project will be rolled out to other community venues for the summer programme.
43. Activities included: Dance, Youth Theatre, Fun Fitness, Games, Tai Chi, First Aid Courses, Reading, Circus Skills and Fun Nutrition Activities. These activities were co-ordinated and managed by Darlington Move More Team, Darlington Arts Team and supported by Darlington School Sports Partnership with 300 young people engaged.
44. The holiday club places will available for the equivalent of at least 4 hours a day, 4 days a week, 6 weeks a year. This covers four weeks in the summer, plus a week's worth of provision in each of the Easter and Christmas holidays. Local authorities have flexibility about how they spend this grant and deliver this provision to best serve the needs of the children and families in their areas. Following the five pilots more venues will be facilitated in the summer as part of broadening the offer.

### **England Athletics Facility Fund – Cage Application**

45. The Darlington Move More Team have been successful with a £5000 funding award towards improving the cage facility at Eastbourne Sports Complex from England Athletics. This fund will allow the cage to be fully compliant with the UK Athletics TrackMark and competition standard.

## **Housing Services**

### **Rent Collection**

46. Arrears recovery throughout 2020/21 has provided customers with a balance of support and enforcement and it has proven extremely successful with initial figures showing a £134K reduction in arrears owed from year-end 2020/21. Current arrears have reduced to £630K which is back to 2016/17 levels and over £25 million has been collected since April 2020. No court action or evictions have taken place during this year and although the number of tenants claiming Universal Credit has continued to increase, the average arrears for these customers remains at less than five weeks, indicating how this approach has supported customers throughout the year.

### **Housing Management**

47. An Anti-Social Behaviour Closure Order has been obtained for a Council dwelling at Firthmoor following complaints of anti-social behaviour and alleged criminal activity. The Magistrates' Court granted the order after hearing that the tenant had been linked to drug-related activity and anti-social behaviour over several months. The property has now been boarded up and is closed for three months under the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Crime and Policing Act 2014 whereby no one can enter the flat and anyone who breaches this will be arrested. The Council's Tenancy Enforcement Officer and Neighbourhood Police team sought the order after investigating complaints by residents and ward councillors. Since the order was obtained the tenant responsible has given up their rights to the tenancy.
48. As part of our digital inclusion agenda and commitment to strengthen and expand opportunities for tenant engagement, 75 laptops have been distributed to seven junior schools in Darlington using Community Engagement funding. This enhances the schools' ability to provide online learning for children and ensures children who may have fallen behind with coursework have the opportunity for additional study time and can access home learning. In addition to supporting the children with their learning, information has been provided to their parents on how to access Housing Services digital tenancy platform and Learning and Skills courses to provide training and employment opportunities. We are also hoping for parents to join tenant's group meetings on line and have a say in what happens in their local area. This initiative follows on from a digital inclusion project earlier in the year at Skerne Park School whereby £4K of Community Engagement funding was used to match fund some Section 106 funding for a loan scheme for around 45 laptops.

### **Lifeline Services**

49. All the Lifeline team have now had their second COVID vaccination. A roadmap has also been produced which reflects government guidance but is relevant to our type of group living settings. For example, we have worked closely with Move More to restart our exercise classes and non-essential services such as private cleaners and hairdressers.
50. Further successful bidding from the Infection Control funding has seen further purchases of IPADS throughout our good neighbour, sheltered and extra care, enabling more mobile working within the schemes improving social isolation for our tenants. We are continuing to take a proactive approach to climate change.

51. The Lifeline Service continues to be extremely busy. In one typical month recently :

- (a) 9199 phone calls were received
- (b) 618 incidents were attended
- (c) 49 new installations were made
- (d) 11,178 welfare calls were made by Scheme Managers
- (e) 121 activities were delivered
- (f) Response times averaged 10 minutes
- (g) Only 29 clients needed to go to hospital

### **Housing Options**

52. A joint project with our health partners and third sector saw a number of our homeless people being vaccinated. Feethams House staff dedicated a day to seeing some of our most vulnerable clients. With the support of the Housing Options team, the 700 Club, Foundations, Humankind, YMCA and First Stop clients were supported and transported to the venue.

### **Climate change**

53. Having secured £1.25m grant funding under the Green Homes, Local Authority Delivery Scheme and committed £570k matched funding from the Housing Revenue Account, we continue to identify further opportunities for grant funding. Currently we are working up a bid for the next phase of Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, which aims to use innovative approaches to retrofitting social housing at scale. We are also working with, independent consultants, Savills to provide expert advice and evaluation of our stock and recommendations towards achieving our zero carbon plan. This will provide valuable insight into our stock and recommended works to achieve energy and carbon efficiencies to support those bidding opportunities

**Councillor Kevin Nicholson**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing**