

COUNCIL
15 JULY 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. The Prevention and Compliance Group involving a range of partner organisations continues to meet on a weekly basis to discuss threat and risk and focus on the government roadmap to promote and support a safe and productive economic recovery. The group is working extremely effectively.

Safety on the Railway

3. Following recent reports, a working group involving British Transport Police (BTP), Durham Constabulary and Darlington Borough Council Community Safety are working together to tackle the problems associated with trespass on railways. The work will focus on education, sharing of intelligence, proactive operations and joint problem-solving activities.

Environmental Crime

4. An Environmental Crime Coordinator has been recruited by Darlington Borough Council (12-month contract) to tackle the problems associated with environmental crime and back lanes. Paul McQuillan, whose background is ex Police where he served in the British Transport Police in London will be exploring new ideas to deal with fly tipping and back lane waste issues, involving partners and residents.
5. The roll out of Section 46 Notices continues to address household waste compliance and 62 streets have now been issued with the legal notices. Recently, £400.00 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued for fly tipping offences and a number of cases are pending Court.

Operation Dissipation

6. Over several dates in May, Civic Enforcement Officers and Police colleagues conducted Operation Dissipation which targeted unlawful waste carriers in Darlington.
7. Numerous stop / checks were completed and fixed penalty notices were issued by the Police for a range of offences including transporting an unsafe load, using a mobile phone when driving and not wearing a seat belt.

CCTV

8. As part of the Northgate Project, four additional overt dome CCTV cameras have recently been purchased. All are strategically placed in the Northgate/North Road wards, in response to tackling environmental crime. These locations will be reviewed and future deployment will be in accordance with local information and intelligence.

Trading Standards

9. On 5 May 2021, the Trading Standards team led a multi-agency operation to raid business and residential premises in Darlington and Sunderland as part of a large-scale investigation into the importation and sale of suspected counterfeit watches.
10. As a result of a tip-off, Trading Standards launched an investigation into the activities of a trader that operates locally as well as online. This led to raids at the properties involving Trading Standards, Civic Enforcement and Licensing officers, Durham Constabulary and its financial investigators, National Trading Standards e-Crime Team, North East Regional Special Operations Unit, National Crime Agency and brand representatives.
11. Over 7,500 suspected counterfeit watches, listed assets and other material were seized during the raids; restraint orders, obtained under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, are in place. Investigations are ongoing.

Private Sector Housing

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

12. Planning applications for large HMOs have increased significantly over the last four months, with an additional 60 units of accommodation being proposed across Darlington. While the need for good quality shared accommodation is appreciated, there are a number of additional housing standards above those that are required as part of the planning approval process that need to be met prior to any newly developed properties obtaining a Mandatory HMO Licence. Therefore, the Private Sector Housing Team will continue to work with developers to ensure that the required space, amenity and fire safety standards are met and the relevant licences are obtained prior to occupation.

Local Authority Delivery Scheme - Phase 2 (LAD2)

13. Funding for the Local Authority Delivery Scheme has been confirmed and the programme of delivery commenced in July 2021, with all installations due to be completed by December 2021. The 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.

Darlington Open Water Safety Group

14. Partners are working together to tackle risks associated with open water in Darlington. Significant progress has been achieved which has included target-hardening / control measures at risk sites, increased press / media campaigns, involvement of education, targeted patrols at vulnerable locations and the development of a Water Safety Strategy.
15. RoSPA will be employed to conduct a risk assessment of the Broken Scar site and deliver risk assessment training to key DBC staff who are best placed to then complete risk assessments of the main areas of risk within Darlington.
16. Information on water safety has appeared on DBC and partners' social media, websites, etc. and there was a full page on water safety featured in the most recent ONE magazine. Another full page also appears in the July edition of the magazine.
17. Police and Civic Enforcement Officers carried out Operation StaySafe on the 28 May to safeguard young people (School leavers) on the last day of school. This included key locations close to open water known to be popular with young people.
18. A Presentation by the Head of Community Safety, Community Resilience Officer and the Team Leader of Teesdale and Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Team will be delivered to the Community and Local Services Scrutiny Committee (date to be arranged).

Home Office Safer Streets Fund

19. The project was launched on Monday 7 September 2020. Following implementation 416 properties have been visited by Police Community Support Officers, 110 properties have accepted the offer of safer streets interventions, 81 properties have been completed and 29 properties are awaiting target-hardening measures.
20. 34 properties in some key areas have now been offered the chance to have trellis fitted along their wall at the rear of their home. When fitted this enhances the look of the area but also provides a visible and physical deterrent to potential thieves.
21. Crime prevention products, bought with surplus funds from the initial scheme, have now been purchased and are ready for use. These include fake TVs, door wedge alarms, personal attack alarms, window 'shock' alarms, PIR sensor alarms (to alarm houses or sheds/garages), patio door lock, and high-quality bike locks and UV marker kits. The Police Beat Team have been briefed and are able to offer the products to residents where applicable. This improves the security of the properties, but it also provides an enhanced opportunity for Police/PCSOs to engage with local people and improve confidence in the Police/DBC.
22. Deployable CCTV systems have been purchased and are now available. Crime data will be used to assist in their effective deployment and local Councillors have also been asked to suggest possible locations that would benefit from the installation of a camera.

Safer Streets 2

23. Following a submission to the Home Office Safer Streets 2 Fund earlier in the year, we have been successful in Round 2 of the funding and awarded £266,630 to support extended provision of CCTV and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) in Darlington.

Safer Streets 3

24. The Home Office Safer Streets 3 Fund which is aimed at preventing violence against women and girls launched in June 2021. DBC will be working closely with Durham Constabulary and the Police and Crime Commissioner to develop a bid in support of the above aim.

Arcus LGBTQ+

25. Arcus has been providing a valuable counselling and support line throughout the pandemic, to everyone, not just LGBTQ+ community. The support service is free and is currently averaging 12 calls per night. The counselling service is £1 per session and is dealing with 70 people a week.
26. The Community Resilience Officer continues to attend the Arcus LGBTQ+ Forum (every 4 – 6 weeks) to listen to the views and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community in Darlington and is now deputy chair of the group.
27. The Community Resilience Officer raised the group's concern regarding the UK Government's delay to the ban on 'conversion therapy'. A proposal for a consultation with Councillor Wright went to DBC Councillors and Peter Gibson MP.
28. As a result of conversations within the Forum, the Community Resilience Officer took the suggestion of DBC staff indicating their 'choice of pronouns' on their automatic e-mail replies e.g. he/him, she/her, them/they. The idea is to show solidarity with other staff members and also to prompt discussion with colleagues and partners about sexuality, gender fluidity, etc. The concept (which is voluntary) was advertised via the DBC weekly staff bulletin and has been adopted by an encouraging number of staff.

PREVENT

29. A CONTEST Silver Board (Counter-Terrorism) was held on 2 June 2021.
30. The DBC Local Engagement Plan has been updated to reflect the new Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) - which highlights potential threat, risk and mitigation in our communities – and shared with the Board.
31. DBC has submitted a response to the Home Office PROTECT Duty consultation which was live until the 2 July. This will have implications for DBC, other public sector organisations and businesses to varying degrees. If it goes ahead as detailed in the consultation, it will require the business owner to assess and mitigate the risk to their buildings, employees and public if a terrorist attack was to occur at their premises. The assessment and mitigation will operate in a similar way to current health and safety law – reasonably practicable and proportionate – but it will have an impact on the Council, who will have to assess their own buildings and

could possibly be tasked with inspecting/enforcing the new legislation locally.

32. DBC submitted its Channel Annual Assurance Statement to the Home Office on 19 April. This was the first submission and included the return being signed off by the Managing Director, signalling the level of importance the Home Office attach to the effective delivery of Prevent.
33. One Tension Monitoring Report has been received during the period of this report. This relates to the impact on the local community of an assault on a young Muslim male at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. This is being dealt with by the Community Resilience Officer and local community leaders.

Gambling Policy

34. There will be a requirement to review our Gambling Policy in 2022 and Licensing will soon be seeking approval from the Licensing Committee for a new policy to be consulted on. Licensing have been working on this with colleagues across the region who are in a similar position and seeking advice from the Gambling Commission. It is generally felt that there will be few proposed changes, as recent years have seen a move to online gambling, which is under the control of the Gambling Commission.

Premises Licence Review

35. Darlington Licensing Committee recently revoked the alcohol licence of Akbar Dynasty (on the A66 near Sadberge) following representations made by the Home Office that this premises had been using illegal immigrants to work both in the kitchens and front of house. The premises' licence holder has appealed this decision, which the Licensing Department will be defending in the Magistrates Court. The premises can continue selling alcohol lawfully until this appeal has been heard.

Dog Breeding

36. Licensing currently have two active investigations on-going into unlicensed dog breeding activities, both of which are linked to cross border organised crime. Locally, Licensing are working closely with Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Civic Enforcement and Police to provide a co-ordinated response to any suspected unlawful activity involving dogs, which is an extremely emotive issue for communities. Licensing are also working closely with colleagues in County Durham to develop a cross border action plan to deal with these issues and within that plan will be a joint media strategy.

Crime and Disorder

Darlington	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 31.05.2019	01.04.2021- 31.05.2021	% Increase/decrease
Crime	2109	1872	-11%
Incidents	5619	5195	-8%
ASB	613	675	+10%

Darlington Town Centre	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 31.05.2019	01.04.2021- 31.05.2021	% Increase/decrease
Crime	306	200	-34%
Incidents	616	368	-40%
ASB	85	50	-41%

37. Crimes showing an increase include: Robbery (5 crimes), Racially Aggravated Crime (3 crimes) and Public Order (35 crimes).
38. The increase in Public Order crimes is due to people shouting and swearing due to being intoxicated in the Town Centre.
39. The increase in ASB is due to reports of quad/off road bikes and loud music being played.

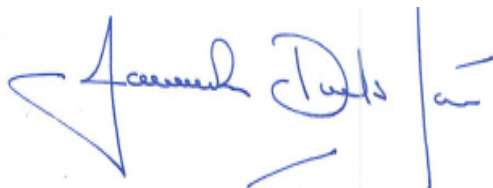
Equalities

40. Hidden Disabilities - Darlington has been asked to be a pilot town to be 'Sunflower friendly' for the Hidden Disabilities programme. Over 100 businesses have completed a training quiz to learn about who may have a hidden impairment and how to welcome them to Darlington, through good customer service skills. We have worked with DAD to refine the training to ensure the training is correct. To launch this programme, we commissioned artist Sarah Oatley who has been working with over 130 volunteers to create a yarn bomb of flowers which will be making the town centre more vibrant and welcoming. The Hidden Disabilities scheme is an internationally recognised brand and following our successful Purple Flag award we were asked to support this initiative. There is a huge number of people with a hidden impairment and Darlington looks forward to welcoming them to our town centre.
41. PRIDE 2021 - Darlington is looking forward to hosting PRIDE 2021 between 7-9 August in line with current guidelines and was also successful in being awarded funding from TVCA to support this event. PRIDE in Darlington runs across the whole weekend offering free, accessible and friendly entertainment, information and activity for all to enjoy. The three days are planned to create different atmospheres including live music, food and entertainment with information in the Market Square (subject to COVID guidelines) Saturday 7 August. On Sunday 8 August, PRIDE moves to a quieter more reflective day in South Park and the event finale is held on the evening of the 9 hosted and organised by the hospitality venues around Blackwellgate and the Market Square. Saturday and Sunday is family-friendly for all ages and Monday follows the usual 'Mongay' nights for the older audiences and offers a safe and welcoming evening. The event will be adapted to accommodate the government guidelines that we are following for August 2021.

Climate Change

42. The Private Sector Housing Team has submitted a bid to the Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Compliance and Enforcement Competition, which if successful will strengthen the capacity of the team and to provide funding to: -

- (a) Identify the landlords who are not compliant with the minimum energy efficiency standard (MEES).
- (b) Provide engagement with non-compliant Private Rented Sector Landlords. It is expected that awareness raising of the MEES regulations will form a part of this engagement.
- (c) To develop a clear procedure for compliance and enforcement.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Dulston', with a vertical line to the right of the name.

**Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Deputy Leader of the Council**