

COUNCIL
15 JULY 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. 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 and it outlines the four steps for easing restrictions.
4. Step 3 commenced on 17 May which meant that gathering limits have been eased. Outdoor gatherings are limited to 30 people and indoor gatherings are limited to 6 people or 2 households and each household can include a support bubble, if eligible. People can attend indoor and outdoor events, including live performances, sporting events and business events. Attendance is capped according to venue type. Organised indoor sport can take place for all, all holiday accommodation can open, including hotels and Bed and Breakfasts.
5. A delay in 'Step 4' was announced in June and we are awaiting formal government guidance on plans to move to that step.
6. The situation in relation to COVID – 19 in Darlington has been dynamic and changeable in recent weeks. The Delta variant is now the dominant variant found in all new infections in Darlington. With the Delta variant being more easily transmitted we have seen a sharp rise in cases in Darlington after a sustained period of low rates of infection. This rise in cases has been largely concentrated on younger people in the community and particularly those people under 25 years old. This group has not been offered a vaccination as part of the routine programme until recently, and therefore have not had the benefit of the protection that vaccination provides.
7. With the rise in the rates of infection there has been a rise in the numbers of people who are ill in hospital, but this rise has been relatively modest compared to the rise in new infections. The latest hospital data shows that levels of hospital bed occupancy with patients with COVID-19 including those in ITU have recently risen, however the numbers of patients has not risen in line with the rate of infections and remains historically low.

COVID Communications

8. The 'Keep Darlington on the right track' campaign continues to evolve with adverts continuing to run across various social media platforms. These adverts are helping

to engage with a range of audiences. Information has also been advertised in the July edition of the One Darlington magazine.

9. 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. 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.
10. 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.
11. We also launched a 'Join the Thousands' campaign, which aims to encourage COVID vaccine uptake. We launched this community campaign in Darlington to encourage residents to get a Covid-19 vaccine when they become eligible. Inspired by the national NHS campaign, the local 'Join the Thousands' campaign aims to encourage Darlington residents to join the 67,941 residents to date who have had at least one dose of a vaccine. As part of this campaign, I'm delighted to see new lamppost banners being displayed in community locations for the first time ever. The initial chosen locations are High Northgate, Cockerton Green, Burnside Road, Haughton Road, Combe Drive and Neasham Road
12. I'm happy to consider additional locations for these new banners; should members identify suitable and safe locations within their respective wards.
13. More recently digital adverts PCR Testing – Don't guess, get a test reached 13,298 people with 874 clicks to get / book a test. The PCR verses Lateral Flow Test graphic advising which type of test to take and when reached 5,628 people with 283 results reported.

Community Testing & Community Collect

14. 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.
15. Darlington's community testing programme has led the way and is helping to protect communities right across Darlington.
16. Since our scheme launched in December 2020, about 200 council staff from a variety of roles, including front of house teams at the Darlington Hippodrome and Dolphin Centre were trained to undertake the community tests.
17. With lockdown restrictions easing, our community testing scheme has moved emphasise the click and collect service only. This has allowed our teams to return to their previous roles, whilst still providing a convenient and essential service to protect the people of Darlington.

18. The click and collect community testing service is running from three of the town's current sites (The Dolphin Centre, Head of Steam museum and Firthmoor community centre) as well as two new sites – Eastbourne Sports Complex and Darlington Hippodrome
19. In addition, orders can be made online for home delivered kits via:
www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests

You can only use this service if:

- you do not have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms
 - you're 11 or older
 - you have not been told to self-isolate
 - you cannot get tests from your work, school, college or university
20. Since the launch of click and collect, the total number of kits collected, as of 29 June, is 3,378 (or 23,646 total tests).

COVID-19 Vaccinations

21. The vaccination Programme in Darlington continues to progress well with around 79 per cent of all those aged over 18 having at least one dose of vaccine and around 61 per cent now having received two doses of vaccine. Everyone aged 18 years and over are now being offered the vaccine.

Public Health

22. The Public Health team have been successful in their bid to the Universal Grant scheme from Public Health England. The additional resource will be used to support new and innovative interventions to enable local areas to address and reduce elements of crime in their local communities which are associated with the illegal drug market, particularly acquisitive crime, violent crime and reducing drug-related deaths
23. This will be achieved through establishing a new ACCESS Team (Assertive Community Connection and Engagement Support Service). The team will deliver an intensive programme to improve the experience and outcomes for offenders in Darlington. An enhanced and focussed offer of support will increase treatment options, enhance recovery capacity, develop new diversionary interventions and accelerate and improve integration and improve care pathways with partners in the borough.
24. Public Health has been awarded a grant to increase healthy weight in adults living with Obesity in Darlington. The resource will be used to deliver a project around physical activity, diet, and behaviour change. This will be done in partnership with The Dolphin Centre and the existing exercise on referral scheme, alongside Primary Healthcare Darlington. There will also be an opportunity to trial a digital weight loss programme with Second Nature. For this pilot the target audience will be those who are at higher risk of Diabetes and with a high BMI.
25. As part of the suicide prevention work in Darlington 200 prevention tins are being rolled out. These have been distributed by Healthwatch Darlington as part of the Grassroots money from the region. These give information about what to do if

someone is having suicidal thoughts or have concerns about someone they know. Each receiving organisation is asked to identify a key contact who will undertake short online training to ensure they feel confident and resilient about these conversations. Training has also been made available to internal staff including library and housing staff and is available on the intranet.

26. A grant programme has opened to further support schools and colleges in relation to suicide, prevention, self-harm and mental health. The information has gone out to all secondary schools and colleges in Darlington and will provide up to £2000 for training that meets Health Education England standards. The funding has come from region and will be agreed by a panel and agreements sent out with performance criteria that must be met.
27. Work has recently commenced to look at postvention services within Darlington following bereavement by suicide. Public Health received some external funding from the CCG for this purpose. There is a need to increase the visibility of the service and ensure it supports not only next of kin but friends and colleagues of the deceased too. This is because statistically they are more at risk of suicide.
28. Two town centre restaurants working with the authority's Public Health and Environmental health teams have signed up to the Darlington Healthy Families Catering Award Standard. They are the first catering businesses in the town to apply and receive the award. Other businesses can apply for this award through the completion of a short self-assessment which can be found on the Council's website. This is one of the actions set out in the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan for the borough which aims to help tackle obesity rates in Darlington. This plan has a series of actions planned for all stakeholder which aims to improve the food and nutritional offer for families in Darlington.

Housing Services

Customer Engagement Strategy 2021-24

29. Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards places a duty on social housing providers to involve and empower our tenants in the delivery of housing services.
30. Cabinet has approved the Customer Engagement Strategy 2021-24, which sets out how the Council will meet the standards, including what specific activities will be undertaken, the expected outcomes that will be achieved and how these will be monitored and reported.

Housing Options

31. Our Housing Options service has successfully bid for Government funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) scheme.
32. The grant funding will provide additional resources to help us reduce the already low numbers of people in Darlington at risk of rough sleeping and also help us to manage the increase in homeless people presenting to the Council throughout the Covid pandemic.

33. Whilst significant support has already been provided to those people at risk of homelessness during the pandemic, we are expecting an increase in presentations following the lifting of the ban on evictions and the ending of the furlough scheme.
34. The funding will be used for the following services for 2021-22:
- (a) An Outreach Support Worker will be funded through the Street Link service operated by the 700 Club. This service provides direct engagement with anyone rough sleeping or begging, offering both accommodation and support. This service works alongside other organisations including the Police, Probation, Health services and Community Safety.
 - (b) A Homeless Navigator post will be funded, based in the Housing Options team. This post will work with agencies who have a Duty to Refer clients into homeless services or who support and work with those who may be at risk of homelessness. This role will have a prevention focus where they will negotiate to try and save tenancies by signposting, money management and accessing support services, including registering with a GP.
 - (c) Funding will be used to deliver 2 units of “Housing First” accommodation. This involves setting up a home for someone to give them an opportunity to learn what is required and expected by the landlord, as well as how to live independently. Support is provided through voluntary sector partners and is personalised to the individual needs of the client to allow them to move on to more permanent accommodation.
 - (d) Funding will also be used to help homeless clients in the Housing First properties with items such as mobile phones, travel costs and bonds to secure accommodation.
35. Part of the RSI bid was also to recruit a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator for the Tees Valley. This post will support the delivery of the Rough Sleeper Action Groups and government returns for all the Councils in the sub-region and work with the Prison Service to secure accommodation for people coming out of prison. This post will be based in Darlington, reflecting our strategic position and excellent track record in dealing with homelessness.

Rent Collection

36. Rent arrears recovery continues to provide Council tenants with support and guidance. Legal enforcement action on the most severe cases have recommenced with the eviction ban ending in May and court hearings restarting in June.

The most egregious cases will be referred to court where tenants have failed to make payments despite support and assistance being offered on numerous occasions.

37. The number of tenants claiming Universal Credit (UC) has slowed with 1,539 Council tenants now claiming some form of UC instead of Housing Benefit. The average arrears for these tenants remains at less than five weeks, indicating how the supportive approach has assisted tenants throughout the last year.

New Build

38. Work has now started on the Neasham Road site, which will deliver 450 new homes for Darlington, 150 of which will be new Council housing. Esh Homes, who form part of the Joint Venture partnership with the Council, started the infrastructure works on the site on 17 May 2021. This work will include construction of the roads, utility services and drainage for the site, the first phase of which will be completed in early 2022.
39. At this point the Council's Building Services team will then start the construction of the new Council homes and this work is due to be fully completed by 2026.

The Dolphin Centre

40. On Monday 17 May the Dolphin Centre reopened indoor hospitality along with the rest of Darlington, welcoming customers back into 16 Horsemarket and the Bistro. The reintroduction of these facilities has complimented the popular outdoor pavement café offer that has been in place since Monday 12 April.
41. The bowling alley opened to public on Friday 21 May following a week of intensive training for the team. There has been an excellent response from residents and visitors to the town and in particular during the half term holidays. Feedback has been very positive around the quality, look and overall experience.
42. In addition, the fully refurbished soft play facility opened to public on Friday 28 May which was welcomed by many young families who have not been able to enjoy the facilities since February 2020. The new area boasts an extended toddler and baby area which was introduced in response to feedback from users and this has been very well received. The soft play again provides an outstanding quality facility brought to residents by Darlington Borough Council.
43. The Dolphin Centre also reintroduced swimming lessons in May for the first time since lockdown. Not all lessons could be offered due to Covid restrictions around teaching in the water for lower end stages, but this particular service was a high priority to restart children's water education journey.
44. Further to the above, school swimming returned to the timetable in June. The Dolphin Centre team has been delivering Key Stage 2 school swimming intensives as part of Public Health's Water Safety and Key Stage 2 Swimming School Package released to primary schools in May.
45. The purpose of the funded support was to provide Key Stage 2 children with a targeted programme of water and swim safety lessons before the end of the summer term. The programme filled in the deficit created by the last year of restrictions and missed curriculum time due to the pandemic and associated restrictions. The programme provided these young people with a life skill in swimming, was aimed to improve their confidence but also provided them with awareness and information about water safety before the summer holidays.

Darlington Dragons Rugby League Club

46. Darlington has a new club in town for aspiring Rugby League players. Darlington Dragons is a fledgling Rugby League club training at Eastbourne Sports Complex.

The club accepts players from U 5's to open age ranges and the training takes place at 10.00am on Saturday mornings at Eastbourne Community Complex; sessions commenced on 22 May.

Tees Valley Sport Inequalities Fund Round 3

47. Applications have been approved for Darlington RA to run community-based activities for children and young people, including Intro2 Archery sessions working with people with long term health conditions and/or learning difficulties/disabilities.
48. Applications are currently being reviewed from Middleton Rangers for disability football aimed at children and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities and return to walking football sessions with the Parkinson's Support Group and Step Forward Tees Valley, for people with long term health conditions. The Parkinson's Support Group is for people with Parkinson's and their carers and Step Forward Tees Valley supports activities for unemployed men. If successful, this will be £18,000 of external funding for all projects.



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