

**COUNCIL**  
**30 SEPTEMBER 2021**

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**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

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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 partners now meets on a fortnightly basis to discuss threat and risk and promote a safe and productive economic recovery. The Community Ambassadors continue to support the recovery process with an extension of service until 31 October 2021.

**Home Office Safer Streets 1 Fund – Northgate & North Road, Darlington (target-hardening)**

3. Following a successful bid to the Home Office, measures to deter and prevent burglary are being rolled-out in the Northgate and North Road areas of Darlington. Launched in Darlington on 7 September 2020, progress is as follows:
  - (a) A total of 416 homes have been visited by Police Community Support officers (advice, guidance etc.).
  - (b) 110 homes have accepted the offer of safer streets interventions (target-hardening measures).
  - (c) 81 properties have been completed and 29 other properties are awaiting target-hardening measures.
4. 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.

## **Safer Streets 2**

5. Darlington Borough Council and its partners were recently successful in a bid submitted to the Home Office Safer Streets 2 Fund for £330k to support the provision of additional CCTV and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) in Darlington. A Working Group of relevant partners was convened on 13 August 2021 with expected delivery by March 2022. The town centre was identified as a priority following data analysis of high crime areas in the police force area for additional CCTV to cover gaps in existing provision 17 cameras in total.

## **Safer Streets 3**

6. The Home Office Safer Streets 3 Fund, which is aimed at preventing violence against women and girls, was launched in June 2021. DBC together with Durham Constabulary and the Police Crime Commissioner have submitted a bid including a range of projects around improved street lighting, the provision of e-bikes for patrol in remote areas, multi-agency response teams in the night-time economy, relationship safety education, citizenship programmes, communication campaigns and project support workers. The outcome of the submission is expected in October 2021.

## **Purple Flag**

7. Darlington Borough Council and its partners are working closely to inform their next renewal submission which is due on 8 October 2021. This will be followed by a virtual assessment in December 2021 and, if successful, reaccreditation in January 2022.

## **Safety of Women at Night**

8. Following Safer Streets 3 a further announcement was made by the Home Office inviting partners to submit bids for other activities designed to increase safety of women at night. Partners once again worked productively, and a bid was submitted on 1 September. The bid includes a number of initiatives including the provision of taxi marshals, enhanced training for taxi drivers, safer walking routes, expansion of Pubwatch, vulnerability awareness training for hotels and takeaways and a night safety hub in the town centre.

## **Darlington Community Safety Plan 2021 - 2026**

9. The draft Darlington Community Safety Plan 2021 – 2026 was made available for public consultation, which concluded on 3 September 2021. A survey was launched in five languages and sought feedback in relation to the four key priorities, namely:
  - (a) Protect and Support Vulnerable People
  - (b) Promote Safer Places
  - (c) Tackle Violent Crime including Domestic Abuse
  - (d) Building Strong and Cohesive Communities

10. Following consultation, the outcome will be reported back to the community safety partnership for consideration before final approval of the plan.

### **Civic Enforcement Service**

#### **Environmental Crime**

11. The back lanes initiative continues, with the Environmental Crime Co-ordinator looking at new initiatives and different ways to tackle these issues. Barron Street is a current area of focus for the programme of work. A recent deployment in the Barron Street area of the Borough is proving very successful in deterring environmental crime.

#### **Premises Closure Order**

12. The team collated evidence in order to secure a Premises Closure on 16 Cartmell Terrace, where tenants were allegedly drug dealing. The Closure was successfully granted on 27 July 2021 and will remain closed for a three-month period.

#### **ASB Action Week**

13. A number of roadshows took place throughout the Borough in parks and problematic areas for anti-social behaviour in the week commencing 19 July. This work was undertaken with partners such as the Fire Service and Police in recognition of ASB Action Week: a Home Office initiative. The week proved to be a success, providing opportunities for direct engagement with the public and opportunities to provide advice and support, including vets on site to give advice on animal health and welfare, and several dogs were microchipped by the Council's Dog Warden.

#### **Trading Standards**

14. Trading Standards identified an uptake in the number of complaints from consumers about rogue gardeners and landscapers. On 30 July 2021, a press release was issued with a warning to householders to beware. This included a list of 'red flags' to help people spot the rogues and some top tips they could follow to protect themselves and their money. The press release was picked up by a number of local news media outlets.

#### **Private Sector Housing**

##### **Local Authority Delivery Scheme - Phase 2 (LAD2)**

15. The scheme, which was awarded £676,996.83, has now commenced with E.ON as delivery partners, aims to deliver energy efficiency upgrades to support 95 low-income households. This delivery is across all wards and tenures, with funding of up to £10,000 for each property. Measures such as solar panels and double glazing will improve low energy efficiency rated homes. The scheme is expected to run until March 2022.

### **Sustainable Warmth Competition**

16. An application was submitted by the Tees Valley Combined Authority to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on behalf of Darlington Borough Council, who will be part of a consortium with other Tees Valley Local Authorities.
17. The Sustainable Warmth Competition is a sustainable application for:
  - (a) Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Phase 3: with a scope of providing up to £10,000 to households heated by mains gas,
  - (b) Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) Phase 1: with a scope of providing up to £25,000 to off-gas properties.
18. Both schemes will support low-income households living in energy inefficient properties across Darlington. If successful, LAD Phase 3 is due to commence in January 2022 and will enable the continuation of grant delivery across Darlington for energy efficient measures for a further 15 months.

### **Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Compliance and Enforcement Competition**

19. The Private Sector Housing Team were successful in a bid to the Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Compliance and Enforcement Competition, run by the Midlands Energy Hub on behalf of BEIS.
20. This competition provides funding of £25,000 and resources to support both engagement with private sector landlords and enforcement, increasing awareness and compliance of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations.

### **Community Resilience**

#### **Darlington Open Water Safety Group**

21. The multi-agency working group, chaired by the Head of Community Safety, has completed its initial phase of work and has amended the frequency of its meetings to monthly as it starts to deal with longer term and strategic issues.
22. RoSPA conducted a risk assessment of the Broken Scar site on 22 July. A draft report has been delivered to DBC for comment, following which the group will act on the recommendations as necessary.
23. Inland Open Water Risk Assessment training was delivered on 4 August to key DBC staff who are best placed to then complete risk assessments of the main areas of risk within Darlington. A programme of assessments will now be put together and delivered by these staff.

## **Road Safety Scheme for Schools**

24. 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' which are carried out by teachers and pupils.

## **Arcus LGBTQ+**

25. DBC, Arcus and many others delivered a successful 'Pride Weekend' on 7, 8 and 9 August: 'Day Time' pride in the market-place on 7 August, 'Picnic in the Park' pride in South Park on 8 August and 'night time' pride on the evening of the 9 August. The events received great feedback on social media and DBC forums.
26. The Community Resilience Officer chaired a special meeting of the Arcus LGBTQ+ Forum (which takes place every 4 – 6 weeks) on 6 July with special guest Durham Constabulary Chief Constable, Jo Farrell. The Chief Constable answered questions from the LGBTQ+ community and explained the work of the Police in addressing hate crime.
27. The event was well received by all and the recording of the Zoom meeting was posted on the ARCUS / Police websites so others could view it if they couldn't attend the meeting live. It is hoped other 'special guests' will attend future meetings e.g. The Police and Crime Commissioner, Mayor and others.

## **PREVENT**

28. A Project Support Officer for the Community Safety team was appointed 30 July to support the Community Resilience Officer.
29. No Tension Monitoring Reports have been received during the period of this report.
30. The Community Resilience Officer has made an initial contact with a representative from the Darlington Chinese community. They expressed concerns at the longer-term impact of COVID-19 as many members of the community have 'retreated' in the face of abuse about the virus and the perception of its origin/spread. The Community Resilience Officer will circulate a survey to the community to try and gain a better understanding of their needs and concern and is also considering widening this survey to reach out to other groups, with questions tailored to the requirements of each separate group.
31. The Community Resilience Officer continues to work with the Police, Councillor Ali and others to address concerns raised by the communities in North Road and Northgate that the current relationship with the Police and other authorities is not as would be expected. One idea currently being worked on is the setting up of 'Third Party Hate Crime Reporting Centres' to offer an alternative to reporting directly to the Police until relationships and trust can be re-established.

## **Licensing**

### **Pavement Cafes**

32. 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 approved a streamlined response for pavement café applications to reduce the processing time. This legislation has now been extended until September 2022 and Licensing are developing a 'light touch' approach to renewal applications. It is the intention of Licensing to review the current Pavement Café Policy in the Autumn to reflect changes within the hospitality trade and to incorporate current projects that are ongoing within the town centre.

### **Taxis**

33. COVID-19 has seen a decrease in the number of licensed drivers as demand reduced and many have taken other employment opportunities. This has impacted on taxi operators not being able to meet demand, which has led to complaints by the public to the taxi companies. Licensing is currently working with Operators to speed up the application process for drivers, whilst adhering to our policy and statutory requirements. Demand for taxi services has been increasing as COVID-19 restrictions have been removed, however, it is still too early to predict how the trade will recover from this pandemic.
34. The taxi trade have also asked for a tariff increase, which is currently going through a legally defined process to ensure proprietors and the public receive value for money. This will then be presented to the Licensing Committee for a decision. Darlington currently has the third highest tariff for a two-mile journey within the North East and is the highest within Tees Valley local authorities.

### **Gambling Policy**

35. There will be a requirement to review the 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 following guidance documents from the Gambling Commission to revise the policy. 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. It will however provide an opportunity to raise awareness of gambling addiction through the media releases accompanying the consultation.

### **Licensing Act Policy**

36. Approval was sought from the Licensing Committee to carry forward our current Licensing Act Policy, which was due to be reviewed in April, until such a time where there is a greater understanding of how the pandemic has affected the hospitality trade. This is in line with many other Local Authorities throughout the country who find themselves in the same position. A formal consultation process on this proposal has taken place and no representations have been received. Responsible Authority partners have expressed that this is a pragmatic approach required for the exceptional times we are in. With approval of the Licensing Committee, a report will be submitted to Full Council for a final decision.

### Premises Licence Review

37. Darlington Licensing Committee recently revoked the alcohol licence of Akbar Dynasty (on the A66 near Sadberge) following representations made by the Home Office that these 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 a hearing at Peterlee Magistrates Court on 12 October. The premises can continue selling alcohol lawfully until this appeal has been heard. Grounds for the appeal have yet to be submitted by the licence holder.

### Dog Breeding

38. Locally, Licensing is 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 continue to work 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.
39. A summons has been issued for an unlicensed dog breeder to attend court on 23 September and a recent joint operation with Police and Trading Standards has resulted in the arrest of two people for unlicensed dog breeding, along with other criminal offences. This is likely to result in a court hearing.

### Crime and Disorder

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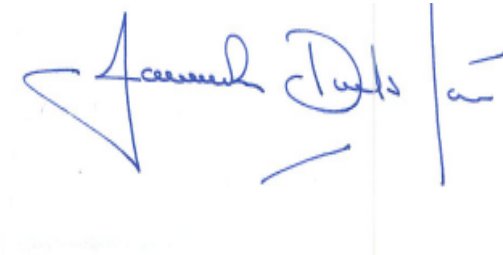
Darlington	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 31.07.2019	01.04.2021- 31.07.2021	% Increase/decrease
<b>Crime</b>	4266	3769	-11%
<b>Incidents</b>	11334	10391	-8%
<b>ASB</b>	1302	1219	-6%

41.

Darlington Town Centre	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 31.07.2019	01.04.2021- 31.07.2021	% Increase/decrease
<b>Crime</b>	600	406	-32%
<b>Incidents</b>	1164	773	-34%
<b>ASB</b>	157	98	-37%

## Climate Change

42. The Private Sector Housing Team are currently involved in several projects aiming to improve properties with low energy efficiency through grant funding and enforcement initiatives.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Dulston', is written over a vertical line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

**Councillor Jonathan Dulston**  
**Stronger Communities Portfolio**