

**COUNCIL**  
**30 SEPTEMBER 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. The Government recently announced a review to assess the country's preparedness for autumn and winter.
3. The COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan 2021 outlines the Government's plans for autumn and winter in England. It includes the Government's 'Plan A' - a comprehensive approach designed to steer the country through autumn and winter 2021/22. It also outlines a 'Plan B', which would only be enacted if the data suggests further measures are necessary to protect the NHS.
4. The Government decided to move to step 4 of the roadmap on 19 July, a new phase of continued caution whilst managing the risks of COVID-19.
5. Step 4 does not mark the end of the need for caution and restraint. At step 4, while many of the legal restrictions that the Government has imposed through the pandemic will be lifted, cautious guidance will remain, making it clear this is not yet a return to normal. While cases are high and rising, everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious. We will continue to manage the virus and provide guidance over the coming months.
6. The numbers of those who were ill following a COVID infection and required treatment in hospital have remained relatively low compared to previous peaks in infection.
7. The pressure on the NHS from COVID-19 appears to have largely plateaued, with a similar number of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 occupying inpatient beds and emergency COVID admissions being similar on a week-to-week basis.

**COVID-19 Vaccinations**

8. Currently, 84.3 per cent of residents over 16 in Darlington have now received one vaccine and 76.8 per cent have now received two doses of vaccine. 56.4 per cent of those aged 16-17 have received their COVID vaccination since the programme was opened to them this summer.
9. Access to vaccinations has been expanded with the provision of a mobile vaccination unit which is operating across the Borough.

10. Our Vaccine Bus, previously the library van has been commissioned by the Council and is operated in partnership with the NHS. The vaccination bus is targeting areas and communities that have been identified as having the lowest uptake, aiming to remove any potential barriers to access by providing vaccinations in their own communities.
11. The bus provided its first clinic at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The pop-up, offering walk-in vaccinations, was mostly attended by young people between the ages of 16 and 21 ahead of returning to college or heading to university in the coming weeks.
12. We hope our community focused approach to COVID vaccinations in Darlington will encourage as many residents as possible to get both doses of the vaccine so we can best protect our communities.

### **Enhanced Response Area**

13. On Monday 26 July, Darlington and the entire North East was listed as Enhanced Response Area (ERA). On Friday 27 August Darlington was removed from the ERA list.
14. The ERA status meant that all Local Authorities across the region were to be provided with additional support by central government, including where necessary and appropriate, support with vaccine rollout, targeted testing, and communications support.
15. Darlington did not receive any additional support as listed above. I put this down to our dynamic walk-in vaccination services, including our new vaccination bus, as well as our successful community testing scheme and our incredible communications plan.

### **Community Testing & Community Collect**

16. As of 14 September 2021, the Council had directly undertaken 32,267 community tests across all our sites in the borough, including 3,113 click and collect kits being collected resulting in 43,436 tests being distributed.
17. Our click and collect community testing service continues to run from five areas across the town's currently, The Dolphin Centre, Head of Steam museum, Firthmoor community, Eastbourne Sports Complex and Darlington Hippodrome.
18. In addition, orders can be made online for home delivered kits via: [www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests](https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests) or collected from community pharmacies.

### **Public Health**

19. The tier 2 Adult Weight Management (WMS) grant from government will be used in Darlington to support those with mild/moderate learning disabilities (LD). Obesity levels are rising both locally and nationally. This will have profound long-term consequences for the health and wellbeing of our communities in Darlington. In 2019 64.1 per cent of adults aged 18 years and above were classified as living with overweight or obesity in Darlington.
20. Public Health are working with the Dolphin Centre exercise referral team, who will support the recruitment and referral process from GPs and local LD partners. Public Health have

commissioned two NHS approved healthy eating/dietary support services. Second Nature, a digital provider with 1-1 dietitian advice to support those with mild LD, and Slimming World to provide face to face support in local groups.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

21. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 16 September 2021. The main discussion item included an update from the Tees Valley NHS Clinical Commissioning Group on the Darlington vaccination programme.

### **Funding for Ex-Offenders**

22. Housing Services has recently been awarded £52,000 to assist ex-offenders to secure rented accommodation in Darlington, following a successful bid for funding. Darlington was one of only 15 Local Authorities in the country eligible for funding, based on our accurate recording of performance information to support ex-offenders in the community.
23. The funding will provide rent guarantees to allow up to 22 clients to access private sector tenancies, provide monetary compensation for any damages and monetary costs for house clearances where clients may be recalled to prison. The Housing Options team will work with landlords and tenants to help them to sustain their tenancies. =

### **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**

24. I am pleased to confirm that a comprehensive support package has been agreed that will see four families from Afghanistan move to Darlington.
25. The council has worked closely with central government and the North East Migration Partnership over the last few weeks to ensure that what we put in place is suitable and in line with regional our partners. We have always been very clear that Darlington will play its part in supporting the resettlement of people affected by the situation in Afghanistan, and I'm proud that we're able to deliver on that pledge.

### **Homefinder**

26. The new Homefinder housing allocations system has now gone live, replacing the previous Compass system. The new system will make it easier for customers to apply for housing, speeding up the registration process, providing customers with better information about available properties and enabling customers to track their bids for properties.
27. Housing Services has been working with other Tees Valley authorities and social housing providers to ensure the smooth transition between the two systems. All of the existing customers on the housing waiting list have been contacted advised of the changes and what actions they need to take. Anyone in bands 1, 2 and 3 have been automatically migrated to Homefinder, whilst customers in band 4 have been supported to reapply and register in the new system. To keep customers informed, the Council website and Housing Facebook page has been continuously updated with the latest news.
28. Data from the new Homefinder system will enable Housing Services to get a much better picture of housing needs within Darlington. A new strategic housing needs assessment will

be developed over the next few months and will help us to plan the next phases of our new build Council housing programme to ensure it meets the needs of local people.

### **Lifeline Services**

29. Sheltered and extra care housing schemes are starting to re-open as a result of the relaxation of Covid restrictions. Scheme Managers are working closely with tenants and their families to try to rebuild confidence in accessing the communal areas and attend activities. Move More are facilitating small group exercises and larger activities have been organised in the communal garden areas (weather permitting).
30. Extra care schemes are now serving meals in the restaurants in arranged sittings and tenants are being encouraged to have their lunch together again. A tenant questionnaire is being developed to allow tenants to make some choices about their activities programme going forward.
31. Lifeline Services has been working with Adult Social Care to launch a 6 week falls pilot that will involve analysis of weekly falls data and will use a falls screening tool that has been specially developed for those that are experiencing more than 2 falls each week. This will enable services to be tailored to a person's needs to try to offer both planned and reactive support. The project started on 16 August and will be evaluated in late September.
32. Work has begun with voluntary sector organisations such as Age UK, The Alzheimer's Society and the Carer Support Service with the aim of creating a range of outreach services from each provider that would be hosted at the sheltered and extra care schemes. This project is in the very early planning stages and will likely involve a small pilot at an extra care scheme.

### **Dolphin Centre**

33. In line with the government's announcement to ease restrictions from Monday 19 July 2021, operational changes were made at the Dolphin Centre to the safe systems of work but continued with a cautious approach over the summer. The key changes were around casual access to family swimming, soft play and the gym rather than having to pre book these activities, which was a welcomed change by customers. Capacities have remained slightly lower than usual levels to avoid overcrowding and all good practice in relation to sanitising and hygiene have remained in place.
34. The start of the holidays did provide some operational challenges with the volume of staff isolating, which at one point was around 24. However, the Dolphin Centre has continued to operate during these challenges and the holiday programme focused on casual access and the new facilities, including bowling and extended soft play.
35. The Dolphin Centre team has been delivering Key Stage 2 school swimming intensives as part of Public Health's Water Safety and KS2 Swimming School Package released to primary schools in May. This continued during the summer holidays with the new Year 6 children being targeted during September and October to help get children caught up on their water education journey.

## **Holiday Activity Fund**

36. The Council has been 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.
37. This summer the Darlington Move More Team planned 20 weekly camps delivered at 9 venues across the 6 weeks of the holidays. All free school meals children received an invitation to attend the camps. The venues were Dolphin Centre, Eastbourne Sports Complex, St Anne's Church, Red Hall Community Centre, Firthmoor Community Centre, Skerne Park Academy, Hummersknott School, West Park Academy and Longfield Academy.
38. Activities included Dance, Youth Theatre, Fun Fitness, Games, Tai Chi, First Aid Courses, Reading, Sport Activities, Circus Skills, trips to Bowling and the Hippodrome, and Fun Nutrition Activities. All of the children were fed a hot meal at lunchtime that meets the government school meals nutritional standards. Over 800 children booked onto the activity camps.

## **Firthmoor Community Centre Multi Use Games Area**

39. The Darlington Move More Team have been working alongside the Football Foundation and Firthmoor Community Centre to upgrade the current Multi Use Games Area on site. The Football Foundation had identified the Multi Use Games Area for potential investment to develop a plan to deliver football and other activities on site. Consultation work took place with the Firthmoor Nursery, Firthmoor Primary School, Darlington School Sports Partnership and Chairman of the Trustees on a potential design, and we are in the process of working alongside the Football Foundation recommended contractors to develop the project.

## **Eastbourne Sports Complex Multi Activity Room**

40. The Multi Activity Room has now opened at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The room is hosting numerous new activities including HIT Classes, Bat and Chat Table Tennis sessions, Exercise After Stroke, Tai Chi, Chair Based Exercise Classes, Breathe Easy Sessions and Holiday Activity sessions. We are hoping to extend the offer for further physical activity sessions over the coming months.

## **Climate Change**

41. I'm pleased to let Councillors know that all newly installed lighting systems in the Dolphin Centre are LED type systems. This will result in energy savings of at least 50 per cent against the systems that they have replaced. LED also has the added benefit of reducing routine maintenance costs as a result of future lamp failures. We have also replaced the air handling plant, including central extract fan units, have been selected with low SFPs (specific fan powers) in mind, which will result in lower electricity usage.
42. As part of the development of the new bowling ally and refurbished soft play the mechanical and electrical installations were upgraded which includes new systems and fittings that reduce energy consumption whilst at the same time improving environmental

conations in those areas. This work is Phase 2 of the programme to replace the mechanical and electrical installations in the Dolphin which are now 40 years old. The final phase will be delivered in coming years which will further improve the energy efficiency of the Dolphin centre.

43. Housing Services has now started to undertake the work to improve the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of Council homes, as part of the first phase of the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) programme.
44. Work commenced in June 2021 to upgrade loft insulation and double glazing to 765 Council homes. The second phase of the LAD programme will commence in the Autumn and will include the installation of solar panels and air source heat pumps.



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