

**COUNCIL
25 NOVEMBER 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

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

2. 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).
3. 98 properties have been completed and twelve other properties are awaiting target-hardening measures.

Safer Streets 2 (CCTV)

4. As part of the refurbishment of Bucktons and Clarks Yards, work to install a CCTV system to replace the old cameras with the latest digital equipment has been completed. The proposal to install seven new cameras in the town centre and ten in the subways as part of the Safer Streets 2 initiative has now reached implementation point, with installation works due to take place in the next six months.

Safer Streets 3

5. Darlington Borough Council and its partners were recently successful in a bid submitted to the Home Office Safer Streets 3 Fund. The bid was successful in securing £453,814 which is excellent news for Darlington and for preventing violence against women and girls in the area. Following a meeting on 20 October, a steering group was convened which will meet regularly to drive forward the objectives of the bid.

Civic Enforcement Service

Environmental Crime

6. The back lanes initiative continues, with the Environmental Crime Co-ordinator looking at new initiatives and different ways to tackle these issues.

Recent deployments in the Barron Street area of the Borough (a current focus) is proving very successful in deterring environmental crime: a launch of trial methods to tackle waste in back lanes of both Barron Street and Wilson Street was launched on 26 October 2021. A Members' Briefing in relation to this project took place on 8 October 2021 with 15 people in attendance. Topics covered included an introduction to the Environmental Crime Co-ordinator, the aims of the project, issues and recommended actions, actions completed to date and the householder duty of care, which comes into force on 1 December 2021.

Trading Standards

7. On 5 October 2021, the Trading Standards team conducted 17 visits to key retailers in the town to offer advice on the laws that apply to the sale and supply of age restricted products - particularly tobacco and vaping products - the laws regulating tobacco and vaping products' safety (labelling etc.), as well as trademark laws. Proprietors were given guidance in writing and advised that further visits were planned.
8. On 12 October 2021, the Trading Standards team joined forces with Durham Police and detection dogs from BWY Canine Ltd, to inspect eight premises (visited and advised the previous week) across Darlington under Operation CeCe. This operation is a national Trading Standards initiative in partnership with HMRC to tackle illegal tobacco. In one shop, illegal products had been concealed in a chimney breast and by a shelving unit. The concealment was operated by an electronic opening and closing mechanism. In other shops, there were light fittings on magnets which, when lowered, revealed a ceiling void used to store illegal products. In total 24,200 cigarettes and 6.65 kilos of hand-rolling tobacco were seized. Investigations are on-going.

Private Sector Housing

Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES)

9. The Private Sector Housing Team have commenced a six-month project following a successful bid to the Private Rented Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard Compliance and Enforcement Funding competition. Work has commenced to identify residential landlords who are not compliant with the regulations. The main aspect of this project is to contact and engage non-compliant residential landlords to ensure compliance. The project aims to improve the standards of domestic private rented properties; ensuring homes are of a certain standard, and that they are more energy efficient. This supports fuel poverty, bringing down energy bills and reducing carbon emissions.
10. An enforcement protocol has also been developed and approved for use.

Community Cohesion

11. Police and DBC staff delivered a week-long programme of online information/question and answer sessions to mark Hate Crime Awareness Week – 9 to 16 October. The launch event on the Monday featured key-note speeches by the Chief Constable and PCC Joy Allen and the announcement that Hate Crime 'support and report' centres will be launched/trialled in Darlington (possible locations – Citizens Advice Bureau, Arthur Wharton Foundation).

Licensing

Pavement Cafes

12. The Business and Planning Act legislation, which allows a streamlined process for Pavement Café licences has been extended until September 2022. Licensing have now issued licenses for all those premises that have applied using a light touch approach. Fewer premises have applied this year as with the lifting of Covid regulations, pavement cafes do not form part of the business model for some venues. Licensing have begun to review the current Pavement Café Policy to reflect changes within the hospitality trade and to incorporate current projects that are ongoing within the town centre. Full consultation will be carried out in the coming weeks with stakeholders and the public.

Taxis

13. COVID-19 has seen a decrease in the number of licensed drivers as demand reduced and many have taken other employment opportunities, particularly home delivery services. 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. Increased demand for taxis at peak times in the Night Time Economy has led to disorder in the main taxi rank at Grange Road. The services of Taxi Marshals have been commissioned by the Council as an interim measure to assist police and create an orderly queuing system. This is being evaluated on a monthly basis.

Licensing Act Policy

14. There is a requirement under the Licensing Act 2003 to review our Licensing Act Policy every five years. This was due to happen this year, however, the Covid pandemic made it impossible to adequately consult with the hospitality trade. Cabinet approved a 'carry over' of our Licensing Act Policy until such a time when 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 are in the same position. It is anticipated that the review process will begin during 2022 and DBC will take guidance from the Local Government Association and North East Strategic Licensing Group on the timing of this.

Premises Licence Review

15. Darlington Licensing Committee 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.

This was due to be heard on 12 October, however for reasons beyond our control it has been adjourned until 14 December 2021. The premises can continue selling alcohol lawfully until this appeal has been heard.

Dog Breeding

16. 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. Intelligence suggests that with the easing of Covid regulations, there has been less demand for puppies and the market price has reduced locally.
17. An unlicensed dog breeder was summonsed to attend Peterlee Magistrates Court on 23 September where he pleaded guilty. He received a 12-month Conditional Discharge and was ordered to pay £150 towards prosecution costs and a £22 victim surcharge. This person had previously been refused a licence by DBC, however, continued to operate his business.

Caravan Sites

18. New regulations that came into effect in July requiring holders of caravan site licences to nominate a person who manages the site to be entered on a 'fit and proper person register.' Darlington currently has 19 licensed sites and the closing date for applications was the 30 September. Licensing, in conjunction with Private Sector Housing, will be assessing these applications following consultation with key partners before the nominated person is placed on a publicly accessible register. An enforcement plan is being developed for those who fail to comply with the regulations. Failure to comply is through the Magistrates Court with the ability to impose an unlimited fine.

Crime and Disorder

19.

Darlington	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 30.09.2019	01.04.2021- 30.09.2021	% Increase/decrease
Crime	6403	5644	-12%
Incidents	17052	15486	-9%
ASB	1973	1776	-9%

20.

DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 30.09.2019	01.04.2021- 30.09.2021	% Increase/decrease
Crime	961	658	-31%
Incidents	1738	1244	-28%
ASB	232	149	-35%

Climate Change

21. In addition to Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard project reported above there are several energy efficiency schemes currently being delivered by Private Sector Housing Team including the Warm Home Fund and the Local Authority Delivery Scheme all of which are supporting the council's Climate Change Action Plan.

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