

**COUNCIL**  
**1 February 2022**

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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**

**Safer Streets Programme**

2. Work is ongoing with regard to the three Safer Streets programmes. The majority of Safer Streets 1 is now complete; Safer Streets 2, all the additional cameras will be installed by end of March 2022 and the group chaired by Detective Chief Superintendent Adrian Green is progressing the areas of work covering education, engagement, marketing environmental improvements and multi-agency response team. All three programmes will be evaluated.

**Civic Enforcement Service**

**Environmental Crime**

3. On 29 October 2021, the back lanes initiative was widened to incorporate Wilson and Chandos Street, where slightly different tactics are being explored. Results from the pilot street of Barron and Wilson are very promising, and feedback from residents has been positive to date. Work continues with landlords in attempt to make results more sustainable for the future.

**Anti-Social Behaviour**

4. Due to recent increases in youth related nuisance in parts of the Borough, the Civic Enforcement Team have been working closely with the Police and Youth Justice Service to identify the individuals responsible and conducting several interviews with parents. 19 Acceptable Behaviour Agreements have been signed and referrals made to the Youth Justice Service for prevention work to be undertaken. Since the agreements have been signed there has been a significant decrease in incidents.

**Trading Standards**

5. Trading Standards received several reports that retailers in Darlington are selling disposable nicotine vaping products to children under the age of 18 years. The price, design, and the wide range of flavours of these vapes, combined with widespread publicity on social media, make them particularly attractive to young people. It is illegal for these products to be sold to under 18s.

Trading Standards is working with Darlington Police to collect intelligence, build up a detailed picture of illegal trading and take enforcement action as required.

6. Trading Standards have conducted a series of covert, mystery shopping-style checks on retail premises in Darlington with a view to identifying areas of non-compliance and to seek a swift resolution with the retailer. This 'solving a problem before it's a big problem' approach pays dividends by boosting business confidence, creating and maintaining a level playing field for businesses trading fairly and by raising consumer confidence.

## **Private Sector Housing**

### **Green Homes Grant - Local Authority Delivery Scheme**

7. Officers have been exploring approaches to identify eligible households in suitable properties and, where necessary, liaising with landlords who are required to fund at least one third the cost of any improvement. Following a series of targeted mailouts and marketing of the scheme, good progress has been made. Applications have been made from all tenures including those in the Private Rented Sector. Delivery has now commenced to install a range of energy efficiency measures to improve properties energy ratings. The scheme is expected to improve around 100 properties and finish in March 2022.

## **Community Resilience**

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

8. All assessments on open water were completed by 10 December 2021 and reviewed by the Council's Health and Safety team on 16 December. Any action required (including barriers, signage) will now be requested to enable installation to be completed before Easter 2022.

## **Community Cohesion**

9. The Community Resilience Officer delivered a presentation on the Safer Streets 3 project in Darlington on 1 December 2021, as part of the '16 Days of Activism' to mark UN Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls. This was open to professionals and Members from across the Tees Valley area and was well attended.

## **Licensing**

### **Pavement Cafes**

10. 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 licences for all those premises that have applied using a light touch approach. Fewer premises have applied this year due to the lifting of Covid regulations and pavement cafes do not form part of the business model for some venues. Licensing have commenced a 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. Approval will

be sought from the Licensing Committee for consultation.

## Taxis

11. Due to COVID-19 restrictions there has been a decrease in the number of licensed drivers as demand reduced and many have taken other employment opportunities, particularly in 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 for new drivers and encourage current licensed drivers to return to the trade, whilst adhering to our policy and statutory requirements.
12. On the approach to the busy Christmas period, the Council launched a campaign to run until New Year to raise awareness of the pressures and demands on the taxi trade to ensure people were prepared and planned their night out and journey home. This was linked into tourism and Covid-19 messaging, urging people to enjoy themselves safely. The initiative highlighted measures that residents could take to keep safe on night outs including booking taxis in advance, keeping their phone charged and nominating a designated driver. It was also made clear that waits at town centre taxi ranks were likely to be long. The campaign included a dedicated page on the Enjoy Darlington website, billboard poster sites throughout the town, posters on buses and in pubs and licensed premises and Facebook and Instagram posts and stories. The social media campaign reached almost 30,000 people

## Caravan Sites

13. New regulations came into effect in July 2021 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 2021. Licensing, in conjunction with Private Sector Housing, are currently assessing these applications following consultation with key partners before the nominated person is placed on a publicly accessible register. An enforcement plan has been developed for those who fail to comply with the regulations. Failure to comply is referred through the Magistrates Court with the ability to impose an unlimited fine.

## Crime and Disorder

14.

Darlington	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 30.11.2019	01.04.2021- 30.11.2021	% Increase/decrease
Crime	8568	7380	-14%
Incidents	22287	20464	-8%
ASB	2532	2351	-7%

15.

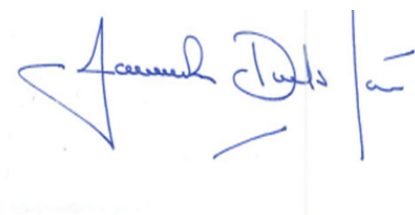
DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 30.11.2019	01.04.2021- 30.11.2021	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1332	924	-31%
Incidents	2396	1701	-29%
ASB	342	199	-42%

### Climate Change

16. In addition to the Local Authority Delivery Scheme there are several energy efficiency schemes currently being delivered by Private Sector Housing Team, including the Warm Home Fund and the Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES), all of which are supporting the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

### Flood and Water Management Act

17. The Environment Agency have recently carried out works to clear the River Skerne of vegetation and debris to improve the flow of water and reduce the risk of flooding.



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