
OVERVIEW OF HOUSING, HEALTH AND PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Housing, Health and Partnerships Portfolio were as follows:-

Public Health

2. World Mental Health Day was supported on 10 October; the theme this year was a focus on children and young people. A social media campaign was delivered using the anti-stigma posters previously developed with Darlington College students. The campaign received a lot of support with Facebook posts reaching over 20,000 people and tweets almost 5,000.
3. The annual 'NHS Future in Mind Transformation Plan' refresh was completed in October. This aims to improve mental health and resilience in all children and young people in the Borough by working in partnership with the NHS Mental Health Trust, the voluntary sector, the Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group and partners in Education.
4. The 2018 Stoptober campaign has been delivered with staff from the Stop Smoking Service Hub visiting community venues to promote access to the service.

Free Flu Vaccines for all employees

5. As part of the Council's commitment to our employees wellbeing, as a trial this year, we are extending the current criteria for free vaccines to all employees. Whilst this programme will not be mandatory it is hoped that the offer assists both our employee's health and reduces the impact of employees spreading the flu virus to families and the wider community who are more vulnerable to the effects of flu. Alongside the programme we will be aiming to increase the overall awareness of the flu vaccine and dispel the myths associated with it, this awareness should also assist with the wider education programme for the community. The administration of vaccines commenced on 1 November and will run until approximately end of January.
6. Whilst it is difficult to aligning the administration of flu vaccines locally to employee absence, the programme will be reviewed taking into account employee feedback and consideration will be given to extending the programme in future years. As far as we are aware, Darlington is the first Council in the Tees Valley to make this offer.

Darlington Partnership

7. Following a meeting of Darlington Partnership, I have agreed to lead a work-stream of the 'Fairer, Richer Darlington' programme. The programme aims to address the growing gap between those who are struggling financially in Darlington and the rest.
8. I have agreed to lead the work-stream which is focused on supporting people's resilience. Boosting the resilience of households means they are more likely to have positive outcomes relating to education, employment and their ability to cope with future challenges. It also requires professionals and organisations to change the way they work to allow them to better recognise the strengths of children, families and communities affected by low incomes. This is a broad work-stream which will involve a range of activities across agencies in public, private and voluntary sectors. It will also involve making changes to the way the Council provides services.
9. As a first step, I will be holding engagement sessions with different communities in Darlington to explain what we are attempting to achieve and listen to their concerns and thoughts on how their lives could be improved.

Housing Services

Red Hall

10. Darlington Harriers, with the support of Heritage on Track, organised a fun run around Red Hall. Participants were encouraged with music from Locomotive Rhythm. Red Hall was chosen because of its location next to the original Stockton to Darlington rail bed. There was a good turnout for this event.

Cockerton

11. Consultation on the development of the second phase of the play park was merged with a holiday hunger event in the October half term. The event based at Windsor Court included an opportunity to discuss the next stage of development and encourage a group to be formed to take an interest in the play area and organise events. There were also be a number of Halloween themed activities for children including making pumpkin lanterns and a Halloween Trail.

Digital Tenancy

12. We are introducing a new electronic way for tenants to manage many aspects of their tenancy from the comfort of their own home. Using a smartphone, tablet or P.C. they will be able to access tenancy information safely and securely. They will be able to get things done faster and can connect to their account outside of office hours. It means they can manage their account at their own convenience.
13. Tenants will be able to :-
 - (a) Check current rent balance and transactions;
 - (b) Print rent statements;

- (c) Make online payments;
- (d) Set up direct debits; and
- (e) Report repairs

14. The Council is currently testing the system and have engaged with the Customer Panel to help support the testing and suggest ideas. A go live date is imminent and the plan is to start with new tenants as part of the sign up process. Existing tenants will also be able to sign up and details will be published via the website and social media to announce when and how to sign up.

Wi-Fi in Communal Areas

15. Wi-Fi technology is being installed into the communal areas of sheltered housing, good neighbour schemes and Extra Care for the benefit of the tenants and their visitors. It will give them the opportunity to use their mobile devices more flexibly within the schemes and will help those visitors who need to access the internet. This links in well with the introduction of digital tenancies as it will make it easier for residents to access on line services.

Railway Housing

16. To complement the Council's new build housing programme, Railway Housing has recently completed a new development of 73 houses and apartments off Haughton Road. Applicants registered on our Choice Based Lettings scheme were able to apply for these properties and this has greatly assisted us in meeting the housing needs of a range of applicants.

Rough Sleepers

17. This year's Rough Sleepers count took place recently, based on one typical evening, and identified three rough sleepers in Darlington. The count involved consultations with various statutory and voluntary organisations. The definition of a rough sleeper is :-

- (a) People sleeping, about to bed down or actually bedded down in the open air; and
- (b) People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation.

18. The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.

19. All three individuals have been offered accommodation and various support options depending on their needs but have consistently refused assistance, choosing to sleep rough and/or beg. Now the colder weather is upon us it is timely to remind everyone of the Council's No Second Night Out Service where anyone can contact us about any concerns they may have on 01325 405333 or Street Link on 0300 500 0914. Our Outreach Service will then go out to the person/place reported to offer accommodation and support. No-one needs to sleep rough in Darlington.

Councillor A Scott
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Partnerships