

COUNCIL
31 MARCH 2022

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

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:-

Public Health

Overview

2. The legislation which introduced the raft of different regulations and measures that were applied to manage the pandemic for the past 2 years now being revoked means that COVID-19 will now be managed in a similar way to other infectious diseases such as flu.
3. Restrictions such as the legal duty to self-isolate for those who test positive for coronavirus and their close contacts is no longer in place, contact tracing of positive cases and the universal symptomatic and asymptomatic testing programme for the public has now been withdrawn.
4. Restrictions in schools, colleges and workplaces have been removed and measures in health and social care are being reviewed and revised.
5. COVID-19 will remain part of daily life but will now be managed through applying the principles of the National Living With COVID-19 plan. This includes maximising vaccine uptake particularly in those most vulnerable to the disease, encouraging safer behaviours including continuing hand and respiratory hygiene and staying at home if they become ill and the deployment of new treatments provided by the NHS.
6. The Council will continue to play a key role in the implementation of the plan locally including encouraging safer behaviours, supporting vulnerable people, and managing any local outbreak of COVID-19 using existing health protection frameworks.
7. The Council will continue to work with partners including UKHSA, the LRF and the NHS in planning for contingencies such as any resurgence COVID-19 or new variants to provide a proportionate local response.

Hospital activity

8. The latest hospital data shows that local hospital bed occupancy and admissions for patients with COVID-19 has been reducing since my last report. There are fewer patients in hospital with COVID 19 in County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and fewer patients in ICU. Between 7 February 2022 and 13 February 2022, 92 went into hospital with coronavirus. This shows a decrease of -33.3% compared to the previous 7 days.

9. The numbers of COVID inpatients has continued to reduce from its peak in January with 78 patients in hospital across County Durham and Darlington on 21 February, a 20% reduction compared with the previous week.

Covid-19 Vaccinations

10. We have continued to support the NHS in its efforts in improving vaccination uptake including the booster vaccine for those eligible. This includes working with the NHS in informing Darlington residents about the vaccine and how they can access it.
11. We have also continued to support the work of the Primary Care Network, Vaccination Centre and our local community pharmacies in their work to provide vaccines in the community in well uses and connected spaces such as at Firtmoor Community Centre.
12. The rollout of the vaccination programme continues at pace with the uptake improving week on week and now with the majority of those eligible in Darlington have now received three vaccinations.
13. Currently 85.5% of all eligible having had a first dose, 80.4% 2nd dose and 64% having booster. This corresponds to 227,369 doses of vaccine being given in Darlington since January 2021 which includes 63,315 booster doses given since September 2021.
14. The uptake of those of school age (12-15 years) who are eligible continues to improve with 61.8 per cent having received their first vaccination since the programme commenced in the autumn school term. This compares to the uptake nationally of 55.8 per cent since the programme was opened to them this summer. The programme for the provision of second doses for this group that commenced in the terms after Christmas shows good uptake with 24.5 percent of all those eligible now having received their second dose.
15. Following the recommendations from the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisations the Government has announced a non-urgent offer of vaccination to all healthy 5- to 11-year-olds of 2 doses of vaccine in the coming months. This will not displace the delivery of other non-COVID-19 childhood vaccinations, such as MMR and HPV vaccinations which have been affected by the pandemic.

Community Testing & Community Collect

16. As of early January 2022, the Council had directly issued 13,141 click and collect kits with a total of 130,396 individual tests being provided across all sites in the borough.
17. Our click and collect community testing service has been available from all the sites in the borough right up to the official end of the programme. This ensured that Darlington residents had access to testing to help keep them and their families safe during the worst phases of the pandemic. Darlington was one of the first local authorities in the country to roll out mass community testing and I am proud that Darlington Borough Council played its part in protecting our communities.

Health and Well Being Board

18. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 17 March 2022. The main discussion items included an update on the Community Transformation Tees Valley and an update from Tees Valley NHS Clinical Commissioning Group on the Integrated Care System.
19. Other issues considered at the meeting included the Primary Care Network Living Well Service and an update from the UK Health Security Agency.

Housing Services

20. We have welcomed our first two families under the Afghanistan Relocation Assistance Policy (ARAP) in January and February. As Members will recall, we have made a pledge to resettle four families in Darlington and we are currently waiting for an appropriate family match for the remaining two properties we have offered.
21. Once families arrive in Darlington, they receive a comprehensive integration support package as they start their lives in the UK, led by our specialist Housing Refugee Support Officers. Darlington's partnership working has already achieved fantastic results with the newly arrived families. All adults and children are accessing health services, education and employment routes. They are all very capable and motivated, have expressed their wishes to integrate into our community and have praised Darlington for their support.
22. Following the reopening of our sheltered, extra care and good neighbour schemes following the Covid-19 pandemic, our Lifeline staff have recently undertaken a number of engagement sessions with tenants. These sessions have taken place at Havelock Street, Rockwell House, Tennyson Gardens, Linden Court, Bank Top and Park Place.
23. A range of issues and suggestions for service improvements were discussed including:
 - (a) A request for funding for communal tablet PCs at Havelock Street.
 - (b) A tenant survey to be arranged around the scooter store at Rockwell House, following some issues raised by the tenants.
 - (c) A request for funding for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations at Tennyson Gardens.
 - (d) A request for a wider range of activities in the communal area at Linden Court and refurbishment of the outside benches.
 - (e) Discussions around nuisance parking, littering, dog fouling and other reports of anti-social behaviour. Litter picks have been arranged and an increase in Police patrols has had a positive impact.
24. Tenant engagement at all of our schemes is an important part of the decision-making process that forms the basis of our Customer Engagement Strategy in improving the health and well-being of our tenants.

25. Our Housing Services team continue to fully support residents to pay their rent and sustain their tenancies through income maximisation and, when appropriate, enforcement action. Since April 2021 over £21.5 million has been collected towards rent and arrears with weekly collection rates over 96%. In addition, tenants have been awarded over £93,000 in Northumbrian Water Social Housing Tariff grants in 2021-22 through support offered by Tenancy Sustainment Officers.

New Build

26. Our new Council house building programme continues to go from strength to strength and as with all our previous new build schemes, our new Council homes continue to be very popular with residents and are in high demand, with properties built to a high quality and specification. I recently undertook a visit to our newest council properties at Lancaster Close. New tenants have started to move in this month, with the remaining 32 properties on this site due for completion by May.
27. Construction work has also starting on the Sherbourne Close (phase 2) site. This site will provide 14 additional and much needed new homes, including 8 apartments, 5 houses and one larger property for Children's Services.
28. I am also pleased to confirm that, following a successful bid for funding, Homes England has confirmed that they will be contributing £585,000 towards this project. Construction is due to be completed in early 2023.

Climate Change

29. I am pleased to report that our Housing Services team has been successful in bidding for £290,000 of funding from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This additional money will be used to fund a full package of measures to improve the energy efficiency of 23 Council properties, including:
 - (a) New external wall and cavity wall insulation.
 - (b) New loft insulation.
 - (c) New double glazed windows.
 - (d) Solar PV panels.
30. The 23 properties identified as benefitting from these measures will be those that can achieve the largest carbon reductions and the biggest reductions in tenant's energy bills.

Dolphin Centre

31. The event programme continues to recover following Covid welcoming new events such as the International Dance Teachers Association Dance Competition which attracted 200 young dancers and 300 spectators from all over the North East in early February.
32. February was incredibly busy in all business areas including family favourites featured within February Half Term such as swimming, bowling and soft play. The bowling alley has been very well attended and despite opening into the new financial year with restrictions, it is hitting business plan targets and contributing to increased footfall in catering services.

33. Gym membership has increased by 50 % since the Dolphin Centre re-opened with the total members reported in February being 1,550.
34. The team are currently planning the Dolphin Centre's 40th Birthday Celebrations for November with a programme of events and activities starting in summer.

Holiday Activity Fund

35. The plan of sessions for the Holiday Activity Fund programmes in 2022 are being finalised. The first sessions will take place during the February half-term week and take up is already good. Over 40 programmes are being planned throughout the year, aiming to engage with 3,000 children aged 5-16 years old who are entitled to free school meals.

Tackling Inequalities Funding (Sport England)

36. Three applications have so far been submitted for the above funding from Skerne Park Community Association (£9,400), Red Balloons Mental Health Support (£9,530) and Darlington Table Tennis Academy (£650). Talks are ongoing with Downs Syndrome North-East to support them in submitting an application.

Sheltered Housing Project

37. The Move More team have started delivering sessions to the sheltered housing schemes, outside at first and now inside as restrictions have lifted. The programme has engaged 108 residents from the sheltered housing schemes within the town. The gentle activity sessions are offered to all residents and there are 13 sessions set-up weekly. The majority of the residents are aged 60 years plus. The activity sessions had 1,199 attendances in 2021.



Councillor Kevin Nicholson
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing