

COUNCIL
12 MAY 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:

COVID-19 RESPONSE: Living with Covid-19

2. The government's plan for removing the remaining legal restrictions was communicated in the Living with Covid-19 Plan on 21 February 2022.
3. From 1 April, the Government has removed the current guidance on domestic voluntary COVID-status certification and will no longer recommend that certain venues use the NHS COVID Pass
4. People will continue to be advised that there are safer behaviours they can adopt to reduce the risk of infection. Precautions remain particularly important to those who are at higher risk if they catch COVID-19, although due to advances in vaccination and therapeutics, this group is now better protected.

Public Health

5. The authority has been successful as being one of fifty other local authorities who have been awarded additional grant funding from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities to support improvements in the quality and capacity of local drug and alcohol treatment systems over the next 3 years.
6. This grant funding known as the Supplemental Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant, will be used to enhance the existing investments in drug and alcohol treatment through the Public Health Grant to support the improvements in substance misuse services.
7. There are 27 school staff who have signed up for the Darlington School Food Qualification. This is an accredited programme developed by Public Health and Environmental Health for school kitchen staff. It creates and embeds a healthy food culture schools catering offers which will mean all children have access to healthy balanced meals in their school day.
8. The Healthy Early Years awards have been developed by Public Health and Education. These awards are for local nurseries and childminders to enable them to increase healthy eating and physical activity through movement throughout the day. This award has generated a lot of interest in providers and there has already been two providers who have successfully achieved an award. This award will go on to childcare providers family's information and will help parents with their choice about a childcare provider.

9. The Mental Health Prevention Concordat brings partners together to work together on addressing the key issues in Darlington affecting mental health. This will bring partners together to focus on delivering prevention in local communities to and promote good mental health and tackle stigma but also make sure that there is support when it is needed for local communities. Public Health continues to work with partners and the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities regionally to agree how this Concordat will be managed and delivered in Darlington.

Rent Collection

10. During 2021-22, Housing Services collected a total of £25.6 million in rent, which represents 97.5 per cent of the total rent debit. Rent arrears are relative to pre-Covid levels, which is a fantastic achievement for the team given the pressures of the past 2 years. The number of Council tenants receiving Universal Credit continues to increase, despite that, the average amount of rent arrears for tenants receiving Universal Credit continues to reduce.

Health and Safety Compliance

11. From January, we have started to introduce MOT style testing for our annual gas services in our Council properties. This will change the way we carry out our servicing, completing more gas services during the summer months, thereby giving more availability for gas operatives to undertake responsive repairs during winter, where demand traditionally increases. MOT style gas servicing will ensure a property keeps the same anniversary date each year if they have their service completed within 2 months of this date.
12. As part of our 5-year phased plan for electrical checks to be completed on all of our Council properties, we have recently introduced a new process to complete these checks on void properties. Completing checks when properties are empty is easier for our operatives and better for tenants as the checks can be quite intrusive, for example when furniture has to be moved to gain access to electrical sockets.
13. A programme to ensure every Council property is fitted with a carbon monoxide monitor and that these are checked periodically is currently being developed, in line with new Government legislation. However, carbon monoxide monitors are now being fitted as part of the annual gas servicing, periodic electrical checks and as part of our internal planned maintenance programme.

Lifeline Services

14. Lifeline Scheme Managers have recently undertaken training by the Alzheimer's Society to help deliver Games for the Brain training, which helps people living with dementia to stay active. Scheme Managers continue to work closely with the Alzheimer's Society, ensuring that residents, particularly within our extra care schemes are referred into the service.

New Build

15. Work on the Neasham Road new build site will commence shortly, and I am pleased to report that we have been successful in securing £7.35 million of funding from Homes

England, which equates to £49,000 for each property. This is a significant investment from the Government, reflecting the strategic importance of this site in delivering affordable homes to Darlington residents.

Homes for Ukraine

16. The Homes for Ukraine scheme enables individuals, charities, community groups and businesses to provide accommodation to Ukrainians and their immediate family. Currently we have 29 sponsors who have registered as hosts in Darlington and 43 Ukrainian nationals planning to arrive in Darlington who have had their visa applications approved.
17. Contact with the sponsors is being undertaken by our Refugee Support team and property inspections are being carried out by the Private Sector Housing team. In addition, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are being undertaken on the sponsors in preparation for Ukrainian arrivals.
18. The first Ukrainian families started to arrive at the end of April and visits are now being undertaken by our Refugee Support team and by Adults and Children's Social Care staff to provide advice and assistance to families and to undertake the required safeguarding checks. Financial assistance is also being provided to Ukrainian families and sponsors, in line with Government guidance.

Dolphin Centre

19. The Dolphin Centre was delighted to welcome back the annual Mayor's Ball on Friday 22 April 2022, which offered an evening of great food, entertainment and fundraising, and this year included DC Bowl.
20. The Easter holidays offered families the opportunity to participate in family favourites, such as swimming and bowling, and also featured soft play parties and mad hatter tea parties for young children to enjoy.
21. Work is underway to upgrade the digital experience for Dolphin Centre customers to enhance their online experience. This will include an upgrade to the existing software to enable much better access for customers.
22. Staff shortages continue to be a pressure and new recruitment campaigns are being trialled to address the issue, which is being felt by sectors nationally. There has also been some progress made with links with the college and opportunities for students to gain employment at the Dolphin Centre whilst gaining valuable experience during their academic year.

Holiday Activity Fund

23. February half term engaged 190 children attending across various locations across the town.
24. During the Easter holidays, 14 events were held throughout the 2 weeks' holiday; 3 aimed at engaging secondary aged children, 8 aimed at primary aged children and 3 specific

events aimed at families with children with additional needs, with a total of 490 places available.

Tackling Inequalities Funding (Sport England)

25. Decisions are awaited on three applications submitted so far from Skerne Park Community Association (£9,400), Red Balloons Mental Health Support (£9,530) and Darlington Table Tennis Academy (£650). Discussions are ongoing with other charities and voluntary groups to assess whether they meet the criteria to submit an application.

Sheltered Housing Project

26. The Move More team delivered 13 sessions weekly in the sheltered housing schemes, with sessions varying from chair-based exercises to Tai Chi and Carpet Bowls. The majority of residents are aged 60 years plus. In February and March, visits were organised to the schemes from Head of Steam Railway Museum and Darlington College Beauty students.



Councillor Kevin Nicholson
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing