

COUNCIL
12 MAY 2022

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

Safer Streets Programme

2. Work is ongoing with regards to the three Safer Streets programmes. The majority of Safer Streets 1 is now complete; Safer Streets 2, all the additional cameras have been installed. The Safer Streets 3 project is also progressing which has a focus on violence and intimidation against women and girls in public places. A multi-agency group is progressing the areas of work covering education, engagement, marketing environmental improvements and multi-agency response team.
3. Further Home Office funds have been secured to open a multi-agency hub to support the violence against women and girls' agenda and for other community groups to have access to. Premises have been identified in Skinnergate and DBC Estates are progressing this.

Civic Enforcement Service

Environmental Crime

4. Work in the new areas for the back lanes project is well underway and proving to be a success. Areas will continue to expand in addition to sustaining the pilot lanes.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

5. A youth injunction application will be heard in court in May 2022. The individual concerned has been involved in numerous incidents of anti-social behaviour in the Whinfield area.
6. Public consultation on the Town Centre PSPO concluded on 2 May 2022 and the outcome will be reviewed and a further report will be submitted to Cabinet.
7. A Premises Closure Order case was heard in court on 21 April 2022. The occupants of this address are involved in the drugs trade, causing nuisance and distress for residents.

Parking

8. The schools parking project, which was delayed due to Covid, launched in April 2022. The project involves young people from the school 'policing' some of the parking issues identified. Vehicle registration details will be noted, registered keeper checks will be

undertaken, and warning letters issued. Success of the scheme relies heavily on the engagement from the schools.

Trading Standards

9. Trading Standards carried out 100 per cent of inspections, utilising remote, online and on-site methods, as part of its 2021-22 targeted inspection programme.
10. It is absolutely vital that Trading Standards uses inspections to support local businesses, including the farming community, to comply with the law. Ensuring the playing field is level for businesses who want to do the right thing has never been more important.
11. Inspections were undertaken in the following sectors:
 - (a) Livestock health and welfare
 - (b) Fireworks storage
 - (c) Car trade
 - (d) Self-storage facilities
 - (e) Key local retailers as part of a 'mystery shopping' exercise
12. Trading Standards is part of a well-developed network of services that actively gathers and records intelligence which contributes to local, regional and national strategies. The local community responded well during 2021-22 to requests for information relating to immediate threats, incidents and on-going investigations. Trading Standards is taking this one stage further under 'Trading Standards – Delivering an Effective Service For You', which will see the team engage with the community to help structure priorities for 2022-2023 and beyond.

Private Sector Housing

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

13. Across Darlington, sponsors have registered to host Ukrainian families displaced by the conflict. The Private Sector Housing Team, working together with Refugee Support Officers, have carried out accommodation inspections to confirm that the properties are suitable for guests being welcomed into Darlington. These initial checks have included ensuring that each property proposed is available for at least six months, is free from serious health and safety hazards and suitable for the number of people to be accommodated.

Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES)

14. The Energy Efficiency Private Rented Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard Compliance and Enforcement funding ended on 31 March 2022. However, the team continue to enforce this legislation beyond this date.

15. As part of the project to improve the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, Private Sector Housing identified approximately 100 non-compliant properties across Darlington. Many landlords have taken action to comply with the regulations by improving their properties and where landlords have failed to engage, compliance notices have been served. The main aspect of this project was to contact and engage non-compliant residential landlords to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Cost of living

16. Private Sector Housing have been working with Northern PowerGrid and the Green Doctor Team to deliver energy awareness sessions at various hubs around Darlington. The first of these sessions were held in March advising residents in relation to how they can reduce their energy bills, make their homes warmer by being more energy efficient, maximise their income and potentially access grants and other support following the rise in energy costs on 1 April 2022. This partnership will continue throughout 2022.

Community Resilience

Darlington Open Water Safety Group

17. A draft water safety policy and strategy was reviewed by the group and comments and suggestions for changes have now been incorporated into a final version for consideration by COB/COE.
18. Zurich, the Council's insurers, have been provided with open water safety related procedures and policies to review. The outcome of the review is expected at the end of May 2022 and will be considered by the open water safety group, who will then recommend/implement any appropriate actions.

Community Cohesion

19. The Community Safety Partnership Cohesion Group has devised a work plan with key actions and measures of performance. The group is required to implement actions contained within the current Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-2026: Priority 4 Building Strong and Cohesive Communities.
20. The Community Resilience Officer is a member of the Ukrainian Refugee Operational Group, to support and consider the possible impact of the arrival of any Ukrainian individuals and families on community cohesion in Darlington.

PREVENT/CONTEST

21. The Publicly Accessible Locations (PALs) Pilot began on 1 April 2022. The first meeting of the DBC multi-agency 'Protect and Prepare Group' took place on 14 April 2022. DBC has completed a 'maturity matrix' (a benchmark of where DBC currently is) which will be used to monitor progress ahead of future legislative requirements.

22. The new Counter Terrorism Local Profile was agreed by the CONTEST Silver Board and changes have been made to DBC's Local Engagement Plan to reflect the current risks identified.

Licensing

Taxis

23. A review of the current taxi policy is to be undertaken. The trade have raised concerns that the pandemic has caused them financial pressures and would like to seek alterations to the taxi policy. A meeting was scheduled with representatives of the trade which took place at the end of April, with a view to take amendments to the Licensing Committee.
24. Licensing has worked closely with taxi meter providers to implement the new taxi tariff. On 14 April 2022, Officers from Licensing assisted the taxi meter companies to update the meters and a provide for free a new table of fares.
25. The new online automated taxi licensing application system and webpages have been developed further. There has been a further delay from the provider but assurances are in place that applications will go live in June 2022.
26. Extension to the provision of taxi marshals has been agreed until 30 September 2022 for Grange Road Taxi rank, with a view to extend this further if funding is available.

Street Trading

27. A case of an unlicensed street trader, who was given several opportunities to be licensed within the Borough of Darlington, was heard in court on 22 March 2022. The accused failed to attend court and the case was proved in their absence. The outcome was a fine of £440 and the trader was ordered to pay costs of £150 plus a £44 victim surcharge; a total of £634 due to the court.

Licensing Act

28. A review of The George public house took place on 17 March 2022 following interim steps to suspend the premises licence, put in place by the Licensing Committee on 23 February 2022. This was due to an incident of serious disorder prior to a Darlington Football Club match on 12 February 2022 where "risk supporters" were seen inside the premises preparing for a fight with away supporters that took place in Skinnergate, Darlington. Members agreed to re-instate the premises licence, as the licence holder had changed to Admiral Taverns and they had agreed conditions with Durham Constabulary. The premises have now commenced trading.

Crime and Disorder

29.

Darlington	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 31.03.2020	01.04.2021- 31.03.2022	% Increase/decrease
Crime	12708	10987	-14
Incidents	34570	30119	-13
ASB	3758	3255	-13

30.

DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE	Pre-COVID 01.04.2019- 31.03.2020	01.04.2021- 31.03.2022	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1904	1436	-25
Incidents	3435	2546	-26
ASB	528	277	-48

Lead Local Flood Authority

Skerne 2025

31. The Council has received an indicative allocation of £700,000.00 from the Environment Agency. This is for a scheme focussing on environmental improvements in the Skerne from Russel Street up to Skerne Bridge in order to improve habitat quality. We will be developing a scheme in conjunction with the EA throughout the 2022/23 financial year with a view to submitting an outline business case for the funding by the end of the financial year. It is envisaged that the improvements will be carried out from 2023/24 onwards. The works will be complete in time for the 2025 Stockton and Darlington Railway Bicentennial celebrations.

Climate Change

32. The work undertaken by Private Sector Housing not only assists residents with the cost-of-living challenges but is also a positive step to address climate change and the efficiency of private sector housing stock.

Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Stronger Communities Portfolio