

COUNCIL
26 JANUARY 2023

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

2. The Director of Public Health and Public Health team have been working to help support the NHS in their efforts to maximise the uptake of the seasonal flu and COVID booster vaccinations in Darlington.
3. This has included using our own communications resources to get the messages out to our local communities encouraging individuals and families to take up their vaccination. Campaigns such as the COVID Booster and Flu Vaccines campaigns are a key part of a broad range of efforts to avoid preventable illnesses and hospital admissions over the winter period. The Public Health team has also been working with the social care settings to ensure that our most vulnerable people in Darlington have been provided with their vaccinations.
4. Following the launch of the Council's Levelling Up Plan the Director of Public Health has been working with colleagues in economic development in investigating the development of a range of tools and metrics measure the impact of the plan on reducing health inequalities in Darlington through focussing on population approaches.

Health and Well Being Board

5. The Health and Wellbeing Board last met on 15 December and the agenda included an update to the Board on the progress of the submission of the Darlington Better Care Fund Plan and a review of the 2022/23 Programme.

Housing Services

Damp and Mould

6. Following the tragic case of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale, who died of a respiratory condition caused by mould in his home, the Regulator of Social Housing has written to all social housing providers, seeking assurance that they have a clear understanding and strong grip on damp and mould issues in their homes and are addressing risks to tenants' health.
7. I am pleased to report that issues of damp and mould in Darlington Council homes are treated as a high priority, including responses to reports of damp and mould from tenants.

Our arrangements include:

- (a) Undertaking a full property inspection of empty Council properties, and remedying any issues before a new tenant moves in.
 - (b) Issuing advice and guidance to new tenants on the typical causes of condensation and what they can do to alleviate problems in their home.
 - (c) Ensuring tenants know how to report issues and responding straight away to reports by undertaking a property inspection, arranging any necessary repairs and new equipment, such as Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) units and providing advice and guidance to tenants on how they can help to manage condensation in their property.
8. We have recently undertaken a stock condition survey of our Council Homes by an independent organisation, and this has confirmed that our homes continue to be a good standard with very few issues of damp and mould identified. Our commitment to continue to invest in our homes, including energy efficiency measures to help reduce condensation, damp and mould issues, whilst reducing tenant's energy bills, is set out in the Housing Revenue Account 2023-24 report.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

9. The annual rough sleeper count was undertaken by staff on the evening of 9 November into the morning of 10 of November 2022. We chose to carry out an Evidence Based Count this year and the data has now been verified by Homeless Link. The outcome of the count was that four individuals were found to be rough sleeping and all were provided with appropriate advice and support.
10. Additional Government funding has been secured for Homeless services in Darlington, including £31,795 additional Winter top-up grant for the Homeless Prevention Fund and £11,000 extension to the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Funding.
11. At the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 December 2022, it was reported that all of the actions within the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy have now been completed, ensuring that Darlington is fully compliant with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. However, it was agreed at this meeting to refresh the action plan for 2023, to ensure that we can continue to meet the demands on our Housing Options service and support those residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Lascelles Garages

12. I am pleased to report that work has now commenced on the demolition and removal of 47 Council garages in the Lascelles area, previously approved by Cabinet. The land on which the garages currently stand, will now be included as part of the tenant's existing gardens, with new timber sheds, new fencing and hard standing to be included in the work.

Dolphin Centre

13. The Dolphin Centre events programme has been very busy throughout December and included five Christmas Party Nights, welcoming around 180 guests on each night to a tribute night and 3 course meal. Feedback from the events has been very positive with reservations already requested for the 2023 programme.
14. Dolphin Centre visitor numbers for quarter 2 (22-23) have increased significantly by 51,443, compared to the same quarter in 21- 22. Visits in July (84,000) were the highest monthly total since reopening following lockdown.
15. Darlington College students visited the Dolphin Centre to launch a project whereby Level 3 Business Students are pulling together a proposal on how the Dolphin Centre can better engage with and attract students to use the facilities. Both year 1 and 2 students have begun a consultation exercise with other students and will present their findings and recommendations to the management team in May 2023.
16. The main swimming pool closed on Sunday 1 January 2023 to accommodate essential works. The pool is 40 years old and requires structural work to be completed that will ensure customers can continue to enjoy the pool facilities in the future. The work is anticipated to take four months to complete, and a temporary timetable is now operating in the remaining pool complex.
17. There have been numerous interventions and changes to the building over the years, the most significant in 2006, which resulted in remodelling of the building, however limited work was carried out on the pool, mechanical and electrical installations at that time. The pool works forms part of a £3.9m improvements programme delivered over the last four years, which has included the installation of the bowling alley, new soft play area and gym refurbishment, as well as improvements to changing areas. Although the main pool remains temporarily out of action, swimming lessons and lane swimming are still on offer in the training pool. The diving pool and toddler pool are also available during maintenance on the main pool.

Holiday Activity Programme

18. For the Christmas holiday period, 16 Christmas themed events were organised at venues across the town offering 610 places. Sessions included travelling pantomimes, pantomime at the Hippodrome, ice skating and Christmas themed activities. The team have also been working with the Parent Carer Forum, who organise sessions for families and children with special educational needs and disability (SEND).



Councillor Kevin Nicholson
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing