

COUNCIL
23 MARCH 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. Making Every Contact Count remains an important part of the work of the authority to help support our residents consider and make sustainable lifestyle changes through day to day interactions with individuals at all levels. Training is continuing to provide those working directly with our most vulnerable communities are skilled and confident in the use of the tools and techniques of MECC. This will ensure that this becomes the norm for all those who work with local communities in Darlington and the evidence supports that widespread exposure to MECC will result in more and more people making changes to their lifestyle and health seeking behaviours.

Health and Well Being Board

3. The Health and Wellbeing Board last met on 16 March 2023. The main discussion item included an update to the Board on the development of a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) following the Ofsted/CQC Inspection on the provision of Special Educational Needs (SEND) support in Darlington.
4. We also considered the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2021-2022 and received an update from the Integrated Care Board on the 2023/24 Joint Forward Plan.

Housing Services

Housemark

5. Housemark is the leading data and insight company for the UK housing sector and allows us to benchmark our performance and costs with other, similar sized social housing providers. A report on our performance for 2021-22 has recently been produced and we have been assessed by Housemark as a “*Good performance, Low cost*” housing provider. Amongst the highlights of the report are the following:
 - (a) Our operational productivity is lower in cost and better in performance than our peers. This is based on overhead costs and front line housing management costs for each property, and our average performance across rent arrears, void loss, staff sickness and staff turnover.

- (b) The number and cost of responsive repairs are low, and places us in the best group, compared to our peers. We completed an average of 2.3 responsive repairs to each property, compared to the average of 3.3 and the cost of each repair was £657, compared to the average of £797. The average number of days to complete repairs was 12.5, below the average of 13.3.
- (c) The number of anti-social behaviour cases was 39.2 for every 1,000 properties, compared to the average of 49.9.
- (d) The percentage of our properties that were vacant was 1.08%, compared to the average of 1.54%.

Mystery Shopping

- 6. Our Tenants Panel has agreed to help us carry out an extensive mystery shopper programme for our Housing and Building Services. This will start in the spring of 2023 and include areas such as responsive repairs, gas servicing and reports of damp and mould. The results will be fed back in our bi-monthly Tenants Panel meetings with any areas for improvement discussed with our teams and action plans implemented.

Homes for Ukraine

- 7. Our Refugee Support team has recently been able to prevent homelessness and the need for emergency accommodation for two households under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The Ukrainian guest's existing sponsorship was due to end in February 2023 and work was undertaken beforehand to secure alternative accommodation.
- 8. One of the Ukrainian guests has moved into Council accommodation and work was also undertaken by the team to arrange a furniture package to support her transition to independent living.

Accommodation for Ex-Offenders

- 9. Our Housing Options team has recently been successful in bidding for an extension of funding under the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Funding scheme. A total of £166k has been awarded over 2 years up to March 2025, to support 50 ex-offenders to secure privately rented accommodation in Darlington.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- 10. I am pleased to report that our Housing Tenancy Enforcement team continue to take decisive action against those Council tenants causing anti-social behaviour in our communities:
 - (a) An Outright Possession Order has been obtained against a tenant living in a Council property in the Parkside area for poor property conditions and for subjecting his neighbours to various forms of anti-social behaviour.

- (b) A Council tenant in the North Road area has been evicted for alcohol related anti-social behaviour.
- (c) The team has also gained possession of a property in the Skerne Park area for drug related anti-social behaviour and verbal abuse, and the tenants are in the process of vacating the property.

11. These actions confirm our zero tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour in our Council properties.

Dolphin Centre

12. The Dolphin Centre website has been improved to provide a more modern and welcoming feel. This comes in advance of the new upgrade to online bookings which will see the digital experience for customers greatly improved. The build of the upgrade is currently underway and is expected to be complete in the spring.

13. February half term welcomed many families into the Dolphin Centre with soft play, bowling and bounce extreme an inflatable playground in the sports hall proving very popular. Although the main pool remains temporarily out of action, family swimming in the training pool and toddler pool were still on offer along with popular diving pool sessions.

14. A new partner Evolve Sports Academy, offering further education in sports related education, joined the Dolphin Centre in February 2023. This takes on-site partners up to 40 and welcomes a new footfall into the centre.

15. Carmel College and Darlington College invited the Dolphin Centre team to participate in a student recruitment fair highlighting opportunities to work for Darlington Borough Council Leisure Services. Interest was shown from students around part-time opportunities and longer-term career options.

Health in Haughton Matters

16. We are currently looking at expanding our existing offer in relation to Health in Haughton Matters. The health walk has seen keen interest each week, Tai Chi is extremely popular, and the Active Life Foundation receive strong numbers for Standing Pilates and Low Impact Fitness. Other activities include Archery, Yoga and Adult Fitness Classes, with 130 participants taking part in the last month. Further consultation has been undertaken with current participants and local residents to see what other activities they would be interested in, together with suitable days and times.

Together Fund – Phase 4

17. Phase 4 of the Together Fund has had an increased onus on the return to play. The fund aims to help people return to their regular activity or a viable alternative as current Covid restrictions have eased. They support groups to strengthen coming out of COVID through developing their governance, business planning and resilience. The four target audiences that the funding is directed towards are Statistically disadvantaged communities, Culturally diverse communities, Disabled people, and People with long-term health conditions.

13 community organisations across Darlington have been successful with phase 4 funding applications with over £50,000 of funding support successfully ascertained for various projects across the town.

Eastbourne Sports Complex Capital Project

18. Darlington Borough Council supported by the Darlington Move More Team has had planning approval for the redevelopment and improvement of facilities at Eastbourne Sports Complex and received the successful funding award of £941,842 funding from the Football Foundation in February 2023. The new facilities will include an updated UK track mark standard athletics track, an additional stadia artificial grass pitch with changing facilities, new reception area and improved car parking facilities. This project will strengthen the current community delivery and will further develop the Eastbourne Sports Complex facilities to be accessible for a wide range of new community groups and partners.

Sheltered Housing Project

19. The Move More team deliver 15 sessions weekly in sheltered housing schemes. The sessions vary from chair-based exercises to Tai Chi and carpet bowls. The majority of residents are aged 60 years plus.



Councillor Kevin Nicholson
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing