

COUNCIL
23 MARCH 2023

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 Programmes

2. The Safer Streets 3 programme continues to progress. The multi-agency safe place, 'number 40', Skinnergate, continues to run well and is independently staffed by volunteers, supported by SIA security. Since opening on 1 September 2022, in excess of 220 incidents have been recorded, where assistance has been provided to vulnerable people.
3. Approaching 30 dedicated volunteers have been provided with training and equipment. A supply of personal attack alarms continue to be distributed to vulnerable people through the safe place.
4. Training has commenced for the volunteers to deliver street support in the night-time economy. This element will commence in April/May 2023, where volunteers will patrol the town centre and offer support to vulnerable people.

Civic Enforcement Service

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

5. Officers continue to refer into the Future Pathways initiative, as part of the Safer Streets 4 programme of work, with the following outcomes achieved in the period of reporting:
 - (a) 8 First Warnings have been given to youths identified as being involved in ASB;
 - (b) 2 Final Warnings have been given to youths who refused to sign Acceptable Behaviour Agreements (ABA);
 - (c) 30 ABAs have been signed;
 - (d) 20 youths have been identified as being involved in ASB and are now awaiting an interview and potential intervention activity.

Environmental Crime

6. In the period of reporting the following outcomes have been achieved:
 - (a) 1 conviction for non-payment of fine for the breach of a Community Protection Notice;
 - (b) 1 non microchipping offence taken to court;
 - (c) 4 court cases pending;
 - (d) 2 Fixed Penalty Notices issued for littering (feeding the pigeons in the Town Centre);
 - (e) 8 Community Protection Notice Warnings issued for side waste.

Trading Standards

7. Since 1 January 2023, Trading Standards, in partnership with Durham Constabulary, has seized tobacco and vape products with a retail value of over £70,000 from 14 Darlington premises. This brings the combined retail value of products seized since late 2022 to over £149,000. Investigations are continuing. In addition, premises which are suspected of engaging in under-age sales of these products are under investigation.

Licensing

8. Licensing coordinated a Tees Valley-wide multi-agency operation (Operation Coley), to tackle metal theft, unlicensed scrap metal dealers and unlicensed waste carriers. This has been in response to concerns that collectors and dealers were not renewing licences following a requirement under the Financial Act 2022 to be registered with HMRC.
9. Licensing, with support from police and Immigration Enforcement, have carried out a series of intelligence led inspections of licensed premises to ensure compliance with licence conditions. Whilst most premises were compliant following scheduled re-inspections, further action will be taken against those that still do not comply. Consideration will be given to prosecute and/or review their licence.

Private Sector Housing

Energy Company Obligation

10. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) is a government energy efficiency scheme, administered by Ofgem. The main objective of ECO4 is to improve the least energy efficient housing stock occupied by low income and vulnerable households.
11. One route that can be used to identify these households is 'ECO4 Flexibility' (ECO4 Flex). The Council has volunteered to participate in the scheme to be able to refer private tenure households that it considers to be living in fuel poverty or on a low income, and vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home.

12. The flexible approach will allow the targeting of low-income households with a household income of less than £31,000, who are unlikely to be in receipt of means tested benefits.

Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2)

13. A bid was submitted in January 2023 for £6.2million to improve energy inefficient properties that are not heated by gas appliances. If successful, the project will be led by the Council to improve 300 properties across the Tees Valley over the next two years.
14. Whilst there are approximately 9,000 potentially eligible properties across the area and 2,800 in Darlington alone this project would continue from phase one, which is currently being delivered and demonstrate an ongoing programme of works to address the issue.

PREVENT

CONTEST Strategy: Pursue, Prepare, Prevent, Protect

15. A number of sessions took place between January to March 2023 focussing on Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in 11 to 18-year-olds in relation to the risk of being radicalised. Sessions took place on 31 January, 13 February and 2, 6 and 21 March respectively, attended by approximately 162 school/college Designated Safeguarding Leads and other professionals working with young people across Darlington and Durham. Webpages on the Council’s website are also being developed to provide ongoing support and information for parents/carers and professionals.
16. A Prevent Awareness event was held on 7 February at the Dolphin Centre. The event was delivered by Counter Terrorism Policing North East and attended by 31 people, including professionals from health, community peer mentors, faith groups and others. Excellent feedback on the session was received from those who attended, and a further session will be organised for September 2023.
17. A mandatory Protect package for all Council staff went live on Academy 10 at the end of 2022. A paper ‘workbook’ version is also available for staff who do not have regular access to a computer or prefer a hard copy. As of 28 February 2023, 79 per cent of staff had completed the Academy 10 package. Figures for workbook completions will be available in early April 2023.
18. The Independent Review of Prevent was published 8 February 2023. Implications for Darlington’s delivery of Prevent are currently being considered.

Crime and Disorder

19. Across the Borough the figures are as follows:

Darlington	YTD JANUARY 2022	YTD JANUARY 2023	% Increase/decrease
Crime	9131	9665	+6%
Incidents	25264	25551	+1%
ASB	2768	2280	-18%

20. The crime increase equates to 534 offences, with public order and harassment rates increasing. This can be attributed to changes made to the way that Durham Constabulary are recording public order offences and in preparation for a change to Home Office counting rules.
21. Incidents have increased by 287 reports, with an increase in youth related incidents. Partnership work between the police and Civic Enforcement teams has been focussed to intervene to try and improve behaviour.
22. Within the town centre the figures are as follows:

Darlington Town Centre	YTD JANUARY 2022	YTD JANUARY 2023	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1174	1195	+2%
Incidents	2118	2058	-3%
ASB	239	198	-17%

23. The crime increase equates to 21 offences, with theft of pedal cycle rates increasing. Further analysis shows that cycles are being left insecure and this is the main reason for the uptick of offences. To address this, the police are holding PACT events focusing on bike security and free bike marking.

Darlington Cares

24. At an event held on 1 March 2023 more than 3,600 hours of volunteering hours have been pledged by companies in a bid to reinvigorate four of Darlington's parks. The Great Parks Auction, organised by Darlington Cares, saw five companies pledge a total of 3,650.5 employee volunteering hours to work in The Denes, Stanhope Park, Eastbourne Park and Fryers Field.
25. Under the direction of auctioneer Pete Barron, companies competed against each other at the event at the Theatre Hullabaloo, to commit their staffs time to helping improve the areas.
26. Working with the council and the parks' Friends groups, the volunteer teams will aim to rejuvenate the areas in the parks that are most in need of care and attention.
27. EE pledged 1,300 hours to The Denes, The Darlington Economic Campus and Redde Northgate donated 700 hours to Stanhope Park, Cummins offered 1,300.5 hours to Eastbourne Park and The Education Village, EE and The Darlington Economic Campus volunteered 350 hours to work in Fryers Field.

Councillor Mike Renton
Stronger Communities Portfolio