

COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 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:-

Introduction

2. It was good to Chair the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board on 7 September, the first time I have done this. It was well attended and partnership focused, as it should be. A central focus of the meeting was health inequality and agencies present recognised the big difference in health outcomes for people living in different parts of our town. Those in attendance also agreed to work together to develop a new Darlington Health and Wellbeing strategy, which will focus on tackling this inequality and a small number of key local health issues where partners can work together to make a difference.
3. Homesearch, our new housing allocations system, is showing continued high housing need. So, over the next few months the team will be analysing information on Homesearch further to really understand the demand for housing, who is on the list and how long people are waiting. Ultimately this will help us see what type of housing we need and where. We will then use this information to support the ongoing development of our council housing building programme, as well as to help us to better work with other social housing providers who would like to develop more housing.
4. Last month I got the opportunity to visit the upgraded facilities at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The new athletics track and the football stadium look first class. I look forward to the official launch on 25 September.
5. Clearly, I have also spent considerable time on the Dolphin Centre and repairs required to this treasured asset (dealt with elsewhere on the agenda). Despite the ongoing works to the main pool it is important to note that swimming lessons and sessions are continuing to be provided and the number of people visiting the Dolphin Centre continues to be positive.

Public Health

6. The Healthy Lifestyles Survey for the academic year 2023 – 2024 has commenced at the beginning of the new term with 33 schools participating this year. The survey has been undertaken every year since 2008. It gathers and analyses information from the children and young people of Darlington about their attitudes and behaviours across a range of health related topics using a systematic evidence based methodology. The results are then used to inform the strategic planning of service delivery by the local authority, schools and other partners. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of our local schools and their

staff in working with the Public Health team to enable young people to participate in this survey. Without their efforts and work in school the survey would not have the reach or response rate that it currently has.

7. The programme of outdoor summer activities has been successfully delivered in a range of green spaces in 16 wards in the Borough. Despite some really wet days the uptake and participation was excellent with many children and young people from across the borough are enjoying the benefits of these sessions. Initial feedback from the participants and parents though social media has been very positive. Work is underway to evaluate this programme along with previous programme to gather learning which will help develop future targeted interventions to reduce inequalities with respect to the use of green spaces to improve physical activity in the borough.
8. As part of the ongoing programme of expanding access to Making Every Contact Count (MECC) a programme of training to increase the numbers of staff and individuals in the authority, partner agencies and the wider community trained in MECC continues. This has included specific training for elected members to become MECC champions in their own communities, to help them to support individuals in changing health behaviours though very brief advice. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is now training their staff in Darlington in MECC. This training will be used by fire officers in their programme of home visits to improve fire safety. This will enable them to provide evidence-based behaviour change information and support related to health behaviours to people they see in their own homes as part of their work to reduce their risk of being harmed in a domestic fire.

Health and Wellbeing Board

9. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 7 September 2023. The Health and Social Care Act 2022 introduced changes to the health and care system, specifically the establishment of integrated care boards, (ICBs) and integrated care partnerships, (ICPs). In this new landscape Darlington Health and Wellbeing Board (which is independent of the ICB but counts representatives from the ICB amongst its membership) will continue to play an important statutory role in joint working across health and care organisations and setting the strategic direction to improve the health and wellbeing of our local population.
10. Health and Wellbeing Boards continue to be responsible for assessing the health and wellbeing needs of their populations and publishing a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) and to publish a joint local health and wellbeing strategy (JLHWS) which sets out the local priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of the population and addresses inequalities.
11. The Darlington JSNA and the JLHWS are due to be reviewed and refreshed to make sure they are effective tools for decision making.

Housing Services

Housing Options and Lifeline Services

12. As part of the national digitalisation of telecare services, the first digital upgrades of our sheltered schemes have commenced this month including, Roxby Court and Ted Fletcher

Court and residents have been consulted about the changes. The digitalisation project is being led by Ofcom, who are the UK's communications regulator, and will replace all analogue services with digital connections, by 2025.

13. Our Housing Options team, together with the 700 Club, have supported a successful funding bid by St Teresa's Hospice. This funding will allow vulnerable people, who would not generally access services, to be able to receive individualised support and attend St Teresa's Wellbeing hubs. The support will be aimed at those people with terminal illnesses, as well as people with long term, progressive illnesses, such as COPD and Parkinson's.

HomeSearch

14. Progress on our new HomeSearch allocations system is continuing at a pace, with 730 applicants now live on the system, as at the end of July 2023. This includes 205 people in the highest priority banding (band 1). In addition, a further 487 applications have been received and are either waiting to be decided or are waiting for further, supporting information to be received. Our Housing Options team has been working tirelessly since the system started in June, to get as many applications live as possible, to enable people to bid for properties.
15. Once we have more applications live on the system, we will have a clearer picture of housing need for Darlington. Our plan is to share this data with other social housing providers to establish a strategic approach to developing new social housing and ensuring that all housing allocations meet the needs of our residents.

Support for Refugees

16. In June, our Housing Services Refugee Support Team, together with the Darlington Association for Refugees (DAR), celebrated Refugee Week 2023; the theme being Compassion. An event was hosted at St Cuthberts Church Hall with members of the Refugee and Asylum community invited along to celebrate Darlington's commitment and support to Refugees fleeing war torn countries. The event included a number of guest speakers from the community and professionals, together with art and music celebrating all cultures. Children from Carmel School attended and gave their experience on fleeing Ukraine and seeking sanctuary in Darlington. The event was well attended.

Housing Income

17. In 2022-23, our Housing Income Team submitted 1,645 applications to Northumbria Water's Social Tariff Scheme to assist tenants who are on a low income or receiving certain welfare benefits and are struggling to pay their water rates. We received £236,020 in funding from Northumbria Water, which has provided significant financial support to our tenants. This was a huge increase of 128 per cent from the funding we received in 2021-22.
18. The Housing Income Team has recently received training from England's Illegal Money Lending Team. The training has raised awareness to staff about loan sharks, including how we can support our tenants who are victims of loan sharks and how information can be

reported to the Illegal Money Lending team.

19. A recent study conducted by the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) and the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH), surveyed 28 local authorities and ALMOs across England that together manage 294,000 homes, close to a third of the sector. The average amount owed by each household in rent arrears rose from £427 to £527, up 23 per cent (about an additional week's rent). Our rent arrears, by comparison, is currently standing at an average of £355 for each tenant.

Apprenticeships

20. I am pleased to report that our Housing Services team has recently taken on 6 new apprentices, working across various teams delivering tenancy management, housing options and energy efficiency schemes. In addition, we have also taken on a new apprentice Electrician for our Repairs and Maintenance team, whilst one of our Joiners has successfully completed their apprenticeship. Currently, we have one Gas Fitter and 2 Joiners entering their final apprenticeship year.

Dolphin Centre

21. The summer holidays welcomed thousands of families to the centre to participate in a range of activities including bowling, soft play, hospitality, family badminton and football. Although the main pool remained closed, families still had the opportunity to swim in the training pool, toddler pool and diving pool. Just under 900 swimming lessons continued to be delivered every week, along with a programme of lane swimming and aqua classes.
22. Bowling attendance over the summer has been very positive with several new events held in the alley, such as live DJ sessions to celebrate GCSE and A Level results days and National Bowling Day, where families could take advantage of special offers in the alley.
23. The indoor events programme introduced a new event, Darlington Comic Con, presented by BGCP. The event provided fun for all ages including artists, toys and crafts, movie and television props, games arcades, workshops, and contests. This was the first visit to Darlington and event organisers were very impressed with the facilities and town.
24. The Dolphin Centre team attended Freshers' Week at local colleges to promote a new student discount card available to students. The team also highlighted a new opportunity to students to become a student champion for the Dolphin Centre, whereby students carry out engagement with other students on leisure facilities and help to inform strategies to attract student usage of leisure facilities.
25. Separate reports have been presented to both Cabinet and Council on the Dolphin Centre Pool project and the team have ensured users and partners have been kept up to date on developments.

Health in Haughton Matters

26. Participation rates have grown month on month since the start of year. The project has recently been successful in securing £6,690 from Sport England Small Grants funding, which will support sustaining and expanding the current activity offer over the next two

years.

Sport England Swimming Fund Phase 1

27. The Darlington Move More Team has recently supported Hummersknott Academy with a phase 1 funding application worth £25,000 towards support with chemical and energy costs for their swimming pool. In Phase 1, £20m is available to support facilities with swimming pools with increased cost pressures, leaving them most vulnerable to closure or significant service reduction.
28. Details for phase 2 capital funding was released earlier this month and the team are pulling a bid together for the Dolphin Centre, to complement the ongoing Mechanical and Electrical work programme, which will also support the Council climate change programme.

Holiday Activity Fund

29. During the summer, the main programme of activities focussed on 5–11-year-olds over 5 weeks, with themes including STEAM, Circus Week and Forest school this year. Music-based activities have been provided, working alongside The Forum.
30. Work continues to support local SEN charities to run activities for children with additional needs during school holidays and a key focus is to continue to try and engage more secondary age children.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing