

**COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 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.

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

2. Reported crime figures have increased and ASB figures have reduced when compared to last year. The significant percentage changes can be attributed to Durham Constabulary recording changes, with more Public Order or Harassment incidents reported as crime rather than ASB. However, the numbers in total have increased when compared to last year.

ACROSS THE BOROUGH			
Darlington	YTD JULY 2022	YTD JULY 2023	% increase/decrease
Crime	3592	4395	+22%
ASB	1265	845	-33%
Total	4857	5240	

TOWN CENTRE			
Darlington Town Centre	YTD JULY 2022	YTD JULY 2023	% Increase/decrease
Crime	486	541	+11%
ASB	102	58	-43%
	588	599	

3. Retail crime is increasing and mirroring a national trend. We have worked in partnership with retailers across the town and funds have been secured to provide equipment to those who require support. We are also working in partnership with retailers to develop a new "Shopwatch" scheme, which will be relaunched this autumn.
4. There have been several incidents involving young people entering derelict and empty properties and also accessing roofs. This is extremely dangerous and involved 23 young people. The Council is working with partners to ensure the appropriate interventions are taken with those individuals and working with partners to outline the dangers of their actions. We have also worked with some owners to provide advice and ensure they also fulfil their responsibility by ensuring buildings are secure.

Funding and Initiatives

5. An ASB Trailblazer Pilot is being progressed with funding from the Home Office to tackle ASB in identified hot spot locations and to support victims. This will enable an Environmental Crime Co-ordinator, ASB Prevention Officer and a Safer Communities Officer to be employed to target reductions in ASB hotspot areas including Northgate, North Road, Park East, Bank Top and Lascelles, Stephenson, Redhall & Lingfield and Haughton & Springfield. Additional funding has also been identified to support immediate justice activity where we are working closely with Youth Engagement and Justice Services and National Probation to deliver reparation activities to improve the environment.
6. I met the Police and Crime Commissioner, Durham Constabulary with Council officers to discuss problems associated with off-road motorcycle nuisance. The meeting has generated an action plan to address the issue and I will provide further updates on content and progress at subsequent meetings.
7. The Council has supported the Police and Crime commissioner to develop proposals for Safer Streets Round 5 (SS5) which will focus on Neighbourhood Crime, ASB and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in defined key Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in Darlington Park East/Banktop. The bid also focuses upon Rural Crime in Darlington West Villages/Middleton St George. I will provide members with more detail when the outcome of the bid proposals is known.
8. Funding is being sought from the national Serious Violence Fund managed by the Police and Crime Commissioner for additional resources within CCTV for peak night-time economy (NTE) demand, Number Forty and the provision of a VAWG specialist resource during peak NTE times. Bids have also been submitted through the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for retaining Taxi-Marshalls in the Town Centre and a Youth Peer Mentor Scheme.
9. A bid to the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity fund (UKSPF) has been submitted and will provide additional resources to support the Community Safety response to parking, crime and ASB in the Town Centre essentially by increasing dedicated resources.

Operational Updates

10. Trading Standards continue to target the illegal cigarettes and vapes, particularly to under-age children, continues to be a priority for enforcement by Trading Standards in 2023.
11. The Licensing Team are focussing on unlicensed breeding of dogs and selling animals, with ongoing money laundering investigations linked to these offences.
12. Environmental Services and Community Safety have secured prosecutions for fly tipping and numerous interventions on environmental crime are underway.

Resilient Communities & Engagement

13. As part of the Safer Streets programme a 'crime reduction partnership' is being formed in the Northgate area as part of the plot work undertaken on safer streets.
14. 'Have Your Say' sessions have continued during June, July and August with the views of over 90 residents captured. Common themes have emerged in relation to dog fouling, refuse / vermin and speeding), and these concerns are being considered by service areas and partner organisations.
15. Prevent is the national safeguarding programme that supports people at risk of radicalisation. Two awareness sessions were arranged for newly elected Members with over 25 participants attending.
16. Protect is the national programme to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack. Counter Terrorism Policing Northeast delivered Protect Training Sessions, including ACT Awareness (Action Counters Terrorism) to DBC staff and local businesses, with over 100 people attending over a number of sessions.
17. I would encourage all members to familiarise themselves with this important agenda so they can promote the objectives through their work in the community. I will circulate further information after Council.

Number Forty

18. Number Forty opened its doors a year ago, aimed at providing a safe space for anyone feeling vulnerable or needing help in the town centre on a Friday and Saturday night the volunteers have helped more than 400 people, 35 people have been given first aid and during the first year this is estimated to have saved £11,000 on ambulance services and more importantly helped the Ambulance service capacity.
19. Number Forty Street Friends was launched in time for the busy Eurovision event in the town centre. The trained Street Friends are currently active in the night-time economy on one to two occasions per month, until additional volunteers can be recruited to the team.
20. I would formally like to thank those volunteers and ask Members to promote volunteering in Number Forty and the Street Friend role.

Climate Change

21. Following a successful bid in January 2023, £6.2m has been allocated by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero as part of the Home Upgrade Grant Programme (HUG2) to improve energy inefficient properties that are not heated by gas appliances across the Tees Valley area.
22. The project is being led by Darlington Borough Council and aims to improve 300 properties across the Tees Valley over the next two years under a partnership name of Home Energy Efficiency Tees Valley (HEET). Work is progressing to get the processes and providers in place to commence the programme of works.

Equality and Inclusion

Public Sector Executives Group

23. The Public Sector Executive Group met on Wednesday 6 September. Ian Williams outlined to the group the emerging priorities of the new administration of the Council and promised further consultation with members of the group. The Director of Public Health outlined the key drivers that would be reflected in the soon to be refreshed Health and Wellbeing Plan. The Public Health Principal highlighted health inequalities in Darlington with the Director explaining the approach to be adopted would address the determinants of ill health.

Darlington Cares

24. Darlington Cares continues to cover its pre Covid position, rebuilding its delivery programme. It has recruited 15 new Busy Readers which are now ready to be placed into schools as the new term starts. A new member, ELG Planning has joined. In response to calls from members, a newsletter has been distributed. 100s of hours of volunteering have been spent in the parks thanks to the ongoing support of its members as part of the Great Parks Auction initiative. The School Uniform Exchange which featured on BBC Look North has had its busiest month to date giving out 1000s of items to 100s of customers.

Voluntary and Community Sector

25. The Voluntary and Community Sector steering group met on the 7 September. It received an update on Darlington Connect, a collaboration of local charities which provides social, financial and wellbeing support to local people in need.

26. Since it opened in March it has helped over 1,000 people with half also receiving wellbeing support in the local community from charitable organisations and a quarter accessing NHS mental health support.

27. The strong joint working fostered by the steering group has allowed it to receive funding from Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust and The Big Lottery. It is also delivering part of the DWP's Household Support Fund on behalf of the Council.

28. I have been keen to engage smaller voluntary sector organisations to find out how the Council, in collaboration with the larger voluntary sector agencies. Darlington Connect hosted a drop in session on 11 of September. 15 Organisations attended and issues raised included:

- (a) Support for recruiting volunteers.
- (b) Support in sourcing funding and bid writing.
- (c) Access to training – particularly safeguarding.
- (d) Access to additional volunteers for larger projects.

29. I look forward to working with the Voluntary and Community Sector steering group in accommodating and working with the breadth of voluntary organisations across Darlington.

Councillor Dr Amanda Riley
Stronger Communities Portfolio