

COUNCIL
30 NOVEMBER 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. This summer was the third year of the outdoor activity programme which is commissioned by the Public Health team to provide opportunities for young people aged 7 – 12 years to experience a fun activity session in a 16 different local parks or other green space near where they lived.
3. The evaluation of the programme showed that 828 individual young people attended these sessions that got them moving, thinking, and interacting, with a total of 1,656 hours of physical activity across the summer.
4. Feedback from the young people, parents and carers showed that they had all enjoyed taking part in the different activities, making new friends, and being outdoors. Most of them said that they had enjoyed it so much they would want to do it again.
5. With winter fast approaching and the pressure on NHS and social care services increasing it is vital that we don't become complacent in the ongoing risk posed by common infections such as 'Flu and COVID-19. It is important for those who are eligible to top up their protection, even if they have had a vaccine or been ill with flu or covid before, as immunity wanes over time and these viruses change each year. People are able to check their eligibility and book their jabs, through the NHS website, the NHS App or by calling 119. Those who are housebound should have been contacted directly for arrangements to be made.
6. The impact of suicide is devastating for families, communities and people involved in someone's care. I opened Suicide Awareness and Prevention Conference in Darlington in October which aimed to get a commitment from partners to develop and implement a multi-agency suicide prevention plan for Darlington. This would focus on supporting those bereaved by suicide, tackling stigma and identifying and reducing the risks in Darlington.

Health and Well Being Board

7. With the Interim Director of Public Health, I have been planning the next meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board, which will take place on 14 December 2023. The focus of the meeting will be on agreeing priorities for refreshing the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Plan. The meeting will provide a forum for leaders and representatives from across the

health and care system to contribute to the development of a strategic plan to improve the health and wellbeing of our local population and reduce health inequalities.

Housing Services

HomeSearch

8. Progress on our new HomeSearch allocations system continues, with 1,061 households now registered on the new system as at the end of September and able to bid for properties. This includes 235 people in the highest priority banding (band 1). The number of people applying to be registered on HomeSearch has started to decrease, with 387 new applications received in September, compared to 1,130 in the first month after we went live.
9. The highest areas of demand we are seeing are in Bank Top and Lascelles ward (110 registered applicants), Park East ward (102 applicants) and Eastbourne (79 applicants)..

Housing Income

10. For the first two quarters of 2023-24, our Housing Income team had collected £14.8m in rent and represents 98.8% of the rent due (compared to 97.3% in 2022-23), which is a fantastic result. This is the most we have collected for this period and compares with £13.6m for the same period in 2022-23.
11. As previously reported, the Northumbrian Water tariff income was the most we have ever received, helping 1,474 of our tenants with a total award of £265k.
12. We have more working age tenants receiving Universal Credit than we do receiving Housing Benefit, and this will only continue as migration for customers from legacy benefits to Universal Credit continues. However, average rent arrears for tenants receiving Universal Credit stands at around £400, which is less than five week's average rent (remembering that people have to wait five weeks for their first payment of Universal Credit, which is paid in arrears).
13. Our rent arrears currently stand at £641k, which is at the lowest level for the past two years. Our Housing Income team continue to support our tenants through these financially challenging times, whilst taking firm action against those who deliberately avoid paying their rent.

Support for people leaving prison

14. As part of the Rough Sleeper Initiative bid for the North East, we are now able to access the services of a prison support worker, who is employed by Stockton Borough Council. This worker will provide support to prison leavers who are intending to return to the Darlington area. Work will include undertaking a homelessness assessment and providing information to our Housing Options team.

15. The intended outcome is that we will be prepared for those people leaving the prison system and they will have a Housing Options officer working with them prior to leaving prison. Ideally, this will mean more planned discharges into accommodation, with less unplanned homeless presentations to the team.

Dolphin Centre and Hummersknott Academy - Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund

16. The government's Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) provides a total of £60 million to local authorities in England as a support package for public leisure facilities with swimming pools.
17. SPSF was split into two phases.
 - (a) Phase one: revenue funding was available to support facilities with swimming pools with increased cost pressures, leaving them most vulnerable to closure or significant service reduction. Hummersknott Academy applied for phase one funding, however, this application was unsuccessful.
 - (b) Phase two, a capital investment fund is available to improve the energy efficiency of public facilities with pools in the medium to long term. The Dolphin Centre has applied for £1,006,041 towards new PV panels, pool covers, improved LED lighting, new windows, installing a new CHP system and upgrading the roof for the PV panels. This will support the current capital project investment if successful.
 - (c) Hummersknott Academy have applied for £160,000 for new lining, drainage channels, improved LED lighting, micro filtration, and new variable speed pumps for their pool. We anticipate the outcome of the bid early in 2024.

Eastbourne Sports Complex Capital Project

18. Eastbourne Sports Complex Capital project is near completion. The UK track mark standard athletics track, and additional stadia artificial grass pitch, opened in September 2023. The new reception area, changing facilities and improved car parking facilities are due for completion in late November 2023 and an official opening will be arranged. 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.

Firthmoor Community Centre Multi Use Games Area

19. The new Multi Use Games Area has now opened at Firthmoor Community Centre. The new facilities were funded by The Football Foundation and s106 funding contributions in partnership with Firthmoor Community Centre and supported by the Darlington Move More Team. This investment will contribute to the facilities for the residents of Darlington, providing sport and physical activity opportunities for a wide range of community partners and new participants.

Haughton Matters Project

20. The project has recently been successful in securing £6,690 from Sport England Small Grants funding with the support of the Darlington move More Team. The activities are being evaluated and from November onwards the provision will slightly change, giving each session the best chance to be sustainable and offer even more variety of activities for the residents.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing