

COUNCIL
30 NOVEMBER 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. Across the Borough the figures are as follows:

Darlington	YTD SEPTEMBER 2022	YTD SEPTEMBER 2023	% increase/decrease
Crime	5630	6452	+15%
ASB	1749	1260	-28%
Total	7379	7,712	+4.5%

3. The crime increase equates to 822 offences, with shoplifting increasing. ASB has decreased by 489 reports. The reporting criteria has changed meaning some ASB is now classed as crime. Across the Borough ASB and Crime numbers have increased compared to the same time last year.

4. Within the town centre the figures are as follows:

Darlington Town Centre	YTD SEPTEMBER 2022	YTD SEPTEMBER 2023	% Increase/decrease
Crime	737	766	+4%
ASB	148	93	-37%
Total	885	859	-2.9%

5. The crime increase equates to 29 offences. ASB has decreased by 55 reports. In the town centre ASB and Crime numbers have decreased slightly compared to the same time last year.

6. The following actions in relation to ASB were recorded in the period of reporting (1 April 2023 – 19 October 2023):-

(a) 31 First Warnings were issued to young people involved in ASB; of the 31 a total of ten young people were inside a derelict building namely Northgate House, four young people were on the Roof of Virgin Money Bank, High Row and one young person was on the roof of a local Store in Cockerton.

(b) Four Final Warnings were issued to young people who refused to sign Acceptable Behaviour Agreements (ABA).

- (c) 18 ABA's have been signed.
- (d) 12 Breaches of ABAs recorded – a parent/guardian will now receive a letter advising the breach has occurred and this will be recorded on the Council's system.

Funding and Initiatives

- 7. Within the statistics for crime Shoplifting is increasing and to support retailers Shopwatch was relaunched on 18 October 2023. Over eighty local businesses signed-up to the scheme and will benefit from a range of preventative measures including, posters, leaflets, banners, What's app, radios, relevant advice and support and Sentrysis, which is a reporting tool.
- 8. A number of areas within Darlington with high levels of ASB have been identified and these are being targeted as part of the Trailblazer's project, which:-
 - (a) Increases visibility in those areas in terms of an officer presence.
 - (b) Officers work closely with residents to establish what issues they are experiencing and 'problem solve' with partners.
 - (c) A youth referral pathway with the Youth Justice Service for young people engaging in ASB to provide 'immediate justice'. The aim being to ensure young people are identified at an early stage and receive the relevant intervention and support to help deter them coming into the criminal justice system at a later stage.
 - (d) Development of the adult element of 'immediate justice' to establish an agreed referral pathway, which Probation are the lead agency on. The aim of immediate justice is that the public see a quick turnaround in terms of 'repairing the harm' and those committing offences are deterred from repeat offending.
- 9. A number of funding bids have been developed and submitted into various funding streams and will focus on neighbourhood crime, ASB and Violence against women and girls, rural crime and the town centre. I will appraise member of the outcome of these bids when the outcome is known.

Operational Updates

- 10. The sale and supply of illegal cigarettes and vapes, particularly to under-age children, continues to be a priority for enforcement by Trading Standards in 2023-24.
 - (a) Investigations continue under Operation Nightstar which targets wider criminality by conducting joint visits with Police to illegal cigarettes and vape sellers reported as selling these goods to children.
 - (b) Advice has been given to these traders on the law with regard to such sales and all illegal products removed.
 - (c) Visits with a tobacco dog under Operation Cece have been conducted which resulted in seizures of illegal cigarettes and vapes.

- (d) Premise Closure Orders have been obtained on a further two problem traders with the stores ordered to remain closed for periods of between two and three months.
 - (e) Joint visits with Police have been conducted in relation to young people selling illegal vapes to friends particularly within school settings to advise them of the criminal nature of such activities.
11. Un-licensed dog breeding continues to be a priority for licensing, especially in light of recent attacks by the American Bully breed:-
- (a) There are a number of on-going investigations.
 - (b) Licensing is continuing to develop intelligence on current ownership of American Bully's in preparation for them being a banned breed later this year. This is likely to result in a registration requirement administered by the licensing team.
 - (c) Two further prosecutions for unlicensed dog breeding resulted in them both receiving a fine and banned from keeping dogs for five years.
 - (d) A separate prosecution for fraud by misrepresentation and unlicensed selling of dogs that was due for trial in October has been adjourned until February.

Resilient Communities & Engagement

12. Counter Terrorism Policing North East delivered Prevent awareness training to twenty designated safeguarding leads from Darlington schools/colleges on 19 September 2023. Another event is planned for early December 2023.

Community Engagement

13. Two events for businesses and communities to launch the North Road and Northgate Crime Reduction Partnership were held on 1 November 2023. The Partnership is planned to go-live early 2024.

Climate Change

14. The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 commenced on 1 October 2023. 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).
15. The scheme will improve the energy efficiency of residential properties mainly in rural areas however we have also received applications from residents in urban areas where their current heating relies on inefficient electric heating systems.

Equality and Inclusion

16. The Council's refreshed Equality Policy 2023-27 was approved by Cabinet in March 2023. At a full Council meeting in July 2023 a motion was passed that recognises Care Experience as a protected characteristic within Darlington. This means that future decisions, policies and changes to services should consider carrying out equality impact assessments to understand the potential impacts on this group of people. The Equality Policy 2023-27 is in the final stages of being updated to recognise this new protected characteristic.

Public Sector Executives Group

17. At its meeting in September the group considered the Joint Forward Plan of the Integrated Care Board and how the key drivers of health inequalities will be incorporated.

Darlington Cares

18. An initiative by the town's business leaders to take a joined-up approach to tackling environmental challenges held its inaugural meeting earlier this year hosted by engine manufacturer Cummins.
19. A second meeting of the group was held at Teesside International Airport, and was hosted by Corstorphine and Wright, a national architectural company, with a base in Darlington.
20. It has been agreed that the management of the group will now come under Darlington Cares which will provide the group administrative support and structure, with a mechanism for measuring individual and collective progress. The group will share good practice, knowledge and connections, while celebrating achievements, and building momentum. It will be a key support for the Council's sustainability ambitions for Darlington in cutting carbon and enhancing the environment for future generations.
21. Demand for The Uniform Exchange Scheme continues to grow and thankfully so does the volume of donations. In August it served 474 Customers, with 2207 items of uniform given out. In September there were 784 customers, and 2353 items given out. Giving a total for the two months of 1258 customers, and 4560 items given out. The scheme serves parents of children across the breadth of schools in Darlington.

Voluntary and Community Sector

22. I arranged a series of drop-in sessions at Darlington Connect to engage smaller voluntary sector organisations to hear their views on how they could be supported best. Fifteen organisations took part. I discussed the findings with the Voluntary and Community Sector engagement group where actions addressing their requests will be developed.
23. A range of voluntary sector organisations continue to deliver a significant element of the Household Support Fund (HSF) with the town centre 'Darlington Connect' resource playing a key role.

24. The Council, along with its voluntary sector partners supported the DWP in its Household Support Fund Awareness Week which commenced 16 October. Access points displayed posters, and the Council's HSF webpage displayed the DWP branding that had been supplied.

Stronger Communities Awards

25. The Stronger Communities Awards this year has attracted 334 nominations and 14 sponsors which is the most that has ever been achieved. With over 430 guests confirmed the event to be held on 17 November will be a great celebration of what is best of Darlington.

Councillor Dr Amanda Riley
Stronger Communities Portfolio