

COUNCIL
25 JANUARY 2024

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 NOVEMBER 2022	YTD NOVEMBER 2023	% increase/decrease
Crime	7654	8382	+10%
ASB	2113	1640	-22%

3. The crime increase equates to 728 offences, with vehicle crime, theft of pedal cycle and shoplifting showing notable increases. This could be attributed to the 'cost of living' crisis. The Police, together with other support agencies, have responded to the increase through various activities including crime prevention campaigns, dedicated patrol, proactive operations and targeting suspects which has resulted in a significant number of arrests.
4. ASB has decreased by 473 reports. This is believed to be a result of continued partnership work and the Trailblazer's project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.
5. Within the town centre the figures are as follows:

Darlington Town Centre	YTD NOVEMBER 2022	YTD NOVEMBER 2023	% Increase/decrease
Crime	974	977	+0.3%
ASB	186	123	-34%

6. Shoplifting and theft account for a significant amount of town centre crime. Shopwatch was re-launched on 18th October 2023 and participation continues to grow with 150 people and over 100 stores involved in the crime reduction initiative.
7. The Police have issued crime prevention guidance to retailers that has helped to target, arrest and remand three prolific offenders. The current detection rate in Darlington is 41% in comparison with the Force at 23% and Durham City at 14%.
8. The 'whatsapp group' facilitated Shopwatch allows members to communicate 'prevention' messages to each other, with intelligence being exchanged daily.

Funding and Initiatives

9. The Home Office Trailblazer ASB Hotspot Patrol continues to cover eight areas in Darlington with increased engagement and patrols to reduce ASB.
10. The following anti-social behaviour outcomes were recorded in the period of reporting (1 October 2023 - 13 December 2023):-
 - (a) 11 first warnings issued to young people involved in anti-social behaviour.
 - (b) 8 acceptable behaviour agreements issued to young people involved in anti-social behaviour.
 - (c) 12 breaches of anti-social behaviour warnings / agreements resulting in further action.
11. The application for Home Office Safer Street has secured approval. Safer Streets Round 5 will focus on: -
 - (a) Neighbourhood Crime and ASB in Darlington Park East / Banktop. (Defensible barriers to prevent motorcycle nuisance, deployable CCTV cameras, and the purchase and installation of crime prevention equipment).
 - (b) The bid also focuses upon Rural Crime in Darlington West Villages / Middleton St George (Employment of two Rural Crime Co-Ordinators, a real time Intelligence Officer, Crime Prevention equipment including two 'Drones' which will improve aerial surveillance and improved specifications of two vehicles for use in a rural setting).
12. The Violence Prevention Fund has recently been launched by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner to encourage organisations to bid for funds which:-
 - (a) Support those aged 18 and under involved or at risk of being drawn into Serious Violence.
 - (b) Reduce Alcohol-related violence in the Night-Time Economy.
 - (c) Support for aged 18-35 already involved in Serious Violence, with a focus on males.
 - (d) Reduce Domestic Abuse related violence with a knife or sharp instrument (repeat DA perpetrators and victims).
13. Partners are currently working on a series of proposals which will be developed and submitted by Friday 12th January 2024.

Operational Updates

14. In January I invited all Members to a briefing on the work of Community Safety team, the aim being to give an overview of the service, invite questions and queries to assist Members in their ward matters and offer the opportunity for further sessions that Members would find useful.
15. The Trading Standards team under Operation Cece (illegal tobacco), Operation Joseph (illegal vapes) and Operation Nightstar (child sexual exploitation in relation to the supply of vapes and cigarettes to children) have responded to incoming complaints and intelligence and have put together several disruption days which have resulted in large seizures of illegal goods removing them from the supply chain.

16. Counterfeit goods including Apple watches, headphones and cases together with various toys have been seized from street sellers, Cornmill Centre stall holders, and retail stores by Trading Standards. Investigations continue.
17. Trading Standards continues to engage with Darlington Farmers Auction Mart and has visited several farmers to advise on welfare concerns and responded to queries.
18. The new XL Bully dog breed legislation has come into effect and an action plan was developed with media attending recent awareness sessions. All intelligence in relation to current Darlington XL Bully owners is being collated under Operation Citroen. Darlington has shared the work undertaken with regional colleagues to assist the roll-out of the new legislation.
19. The Licensing team coordinated an action plan addressing the risks associated serious violence in the Evening and Night Time Economy (ENTE) on the run-up to the festive period involving key stakeholders. This combines preventative measures along with proactive targeted operations. This action plan will also form the basis of a longer-term strategy to reduce the risk of violence in the ENTE.
20. The Private Sector Housing Team are carrying out an increased number of property inspections, the majority of service requests are dealt with informally by providing advice to either the occupiers or landlords. In November 2023, two emergency prohibition orders were served under the Housing Act 2004, to protect the occupiers against severely hazardous living conditions.
21. The last few months have seen higher levels of rainfall than normal. There have been issues with rural roads, mainly due to the amount of water coming off the already saturated fields, the ditches and drainage have struggled to cope. Working with the highways team and Councillor McCollom each of these areas will be revisited once its dry enough to do so to carry out a full survey at each location and make sure the drainage system in place is working as it should be. We will also be looking to improve any of these areas if possible.
22. The highways team have also identified ditches on private land which have not been maintained by the landowner so we will be writing to them to remind them of their obligations.

Resilient Communities & Engagement

23. PREVENT is the national safeguarding programme aimed at supporting people who are risk of radicalisation. At a National Prevent Seminar it was announced that a revised Prevent training package will be released in Spring 2024 and an independent 'standards and compliance unit' will be established to oversee the Prevent process in 2024. Updates will be brought to Members as more information becomes available.
24. The Home Office Prevent Adviser for the North-East Region, delivered a training session to Designated Safeguarding Leads from Darlington schools.

25. An initial meeting of the North Road / Northgate 'Crime Reduction Partnership' will be held end of January / beginning of February 2024. Relevant ward Cllrs and community representatives will be invited to attend.
26. A Crown Prosecution Service representative will be attending the UNITY group meeting on 7th February 2024 to explain their role in relation to hate crime.

Community Engagement

27. Trading Standards attended a Barclays Fraud & Scams event held at Barclays Bank, High Row, Darlington engaging with customers and offering advice and guidance.
28. Trading Standards have issued information in press releases warning the public how to avoid inadvertently purchasing counterfeit goods.

Climate Change – Great British Insulation Scheme and ECO4 Flex

29. In September 2023, the Private Sector Housing Team published a revised Statement of Intent for the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) following the introduction of the Great British Insulation Scheme.
30. The Great British Insulation Scheme and ECO4 Flex are household referral mechanisms within ECO wider schemes, which enable Local Authorities to widen the eligibility criteria. This allows participating local authorities to include households they consider to be living in fuel poverty or on a low income, and vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home, who may not qualify for the schemes via the standard eligibility criteria.
31. Under this scheme, in 2023 the team issued 23 declarations to enable energy efficiency works to be carried out in privately owned and privately rented properties. These works have generally improved the Energy Performance Certificate rating by two bands.

Equality and Inclusion

32. The Hate Crime survey has been adapted to go out via Survey Monkey (as well as other media) and will be launched in January 2024.
33. Number Forty has extended its footprint in the Town by committing to open during the recently re-vitalised Mongay nights; to be held every second Monday of the month. The opening night was 11th December 2023 with a commitment to open throughout 2024 to support all LGBTQAI+ events and members of those diverse communities.
34. Inclusion and fairness are a vital part of making sure Darlington Borough Council works for everyone. I am delighted to launch an updated version of the Council's Equality Policy, and to re-emphasise the importance of these values. The updated policy was published on the Darlington Borough Council website in December 2023. With this refresh of the policy we aim to build on the work we have done to embed the principles of equality in our work, and to strive harder to make sure that no one in Darlington is put at a disadvantage because of where, what or whom they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability.

35. Questions related to single sex services, with a particular focus on toilets have been raised at recent council meetings. The Council has been asked to be clear on its position, and to apply consistency across all of its services. This is a complex matter through which people have different views, and legislation is not clear. The Council recognises this is an important matter for some people, is currently considering options, and will need to engage with a wide range of stakeholders before a clear position can be established. Research is already underway but the main focus of this work will take place during late spring and early summer when more resources can be made available to carry out sufficient levels of engagement.

Darlington Cares

36. Darlington Cares has taken over the administration of a newly formed business lead body, Darlington Employers' Environmental Partnership (DEEP).

37. The group held its first steering group meeting on 30 November at which it appointed Rob Macdiarmid, Head of ESG for Redde Northgate as chair and Darlington Building Society's Chief Risk Officer, David Bews, as vice-chair. Mr Macdiarmid was appointed as Head of Property Sustainability at the Government's Cabinet Office in 2019 before becoming Director of Sustainability at Countryside Partnerships, then joining Redde Northgate last February.

38. Other local companies and organisations involved so far are: EE, North Star Housing, BHP Law, Newlands Group, County Durham Community Foundation, Darlington Borough Council, Teesside University, Serco, and JBA Engineering.

39. The objectives of the partnership are:

- (a) Demonstrate an ambition to reduce environmental impact and transition towards net zero
- (b) Share knowledge practice and to learn from each other
- (c) Link with local, regional and national initiatives
- (d) Celebrate achievement
- (e) Monitor progress against pledges / commitments
- (f) Publicise and grow momentum, showcasing the role Darlington based businesses can play in enabling a just transition to net zero across the UK and further afield.

40. A key focus of the group is supporting smaller businesses that can't afford specialist roles, by helping them access expertise and a body of knowledge to help them progress their plans faster.

Voluntary and Community Sector

41. The collaboration of voluntary and community sector organisations which are delivering access to support services through the town centre base, Darlington Connect continue to

successfully deliver the Household Support Grant. Demand for this support has been particularly high and it is likely that resources will be depleted in advance of the end of the contract period, at 31 March 2024. No indication from DWP has been given about any further round of the fund but in previous years extensions have been announced later in the financial year.

42. Local voluntary sector agencies have submitted proposals for use of part of the Cost-of-Living budget allocation which are currently being reviewed and negotiated with them.

Councillor Dr Amanda Riley
Stronger Communities Portfolio