

**COUNCIL**  
**21 MARCH 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

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**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. I welcomed Mrs Lorraine Hughes, our incoming Director of Public Health at the beginning of this month. I am sure members will join me in welcoming Lorraine. I am sure members will also join me in thanking Miriam Davidson, our outgoing Interim Director Public Health, for her excellent service, as well as wishing her well in retirement.
3. The Darlington Healthy Early Years (HEY) catering award is an award for nurseries and childminders in Darlington, as part of the implementation of the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan. The award involves achieving core criteria, including policies and procedures about the preparation and serving of healthy balanced meals and snacks for preschool children and communicating with parents about the food that their children eat. Once successful they are awarded a certificate and a logo that they can use to demonstrate their commitment to the production and promotion of healthy and balanced meals and snack for preschool children in their care.
4. The award has been developed and delivered in partnership with Environmental Health and the Childcare Development team, currently four nurseries and four childminders have been successful in achieving this award.
5. I attended an event where key stakeholders and service providers who work in partnership to deliver the substance misuse treatment and recovery services in Darlington came together to showcase collaborative working to engage and support Darlington residents who are using substances and require specialist support throughout their recovery journey. We highlighted the need for collaborative working, to ensure that we are giving the residents of Darlington the best chance of getting into treatment/recovery services and every opportunity to improve their health outcomes.
6. The Leader and I visited Darlington Memorial Hospital, we met with the Chief Executive and visited Maternity and the Emergency Department Services. We were provided with assurances that Maternity services are improving.

**Health and Well Being Board**

7. At the meeting on 14 March, the Board will participate in a demonstration of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and will receive updates on ICB changes, the Better Care

Fund, the development of the Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Darlington Safeguarding Annual Report.

## **Housing Services**

### **Housing Service Standards**

8. Our Housing Services team has recently put together a series of service standards, in collaboration with our Tenants Panel, setting out the level of service our tenants and other customers can expect from our Housing Services team. The standards include areas such as Safety and Quality, Complaints, Tenant Involvement, Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Allocations.
9. These new standards will ensure a consistency of service and that we meet the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing. Some feedback surveys are planned in 2024-25 to understand how well we are doing against our standards and what we need to improve on, and the outcomes of these will be reported to our Tenants Panel.
10. Details of our Housing Service Standards can be found on our website at:  
<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/our-policies-and-performance/our-policies/>

### **Estate Inspections**

11. The first estate inspections for 2024 commenced from January and a timetable for the year has been created to confirm the dates the inspections are taking place and on which estate.
12. The inspections are attended by a member of the Housing Services team and representatives of other organisations and agencies who also work within the area. Residents and Councillors are welcome to join to walk around the estates. It's a great way for residents to be involved and have their say and to highlight any issues within the area, such as fly tipping, untidy gardens and litter. Action can then be taken by the Housing Services team to address any issues that are identified.
13. The dates and times for the inspections are publicised on the Housing Services social media page and the Darlington Borough Council website.

### **Lifeline Service**

14. Our Lifeline Services team are progressing with the upgrade of equipment to meet the Government's digital upgrade of telephony services by 2025. Over 3,500 Darlington residents rely on the Lifeline Service to continue to live safely and independently in their own homes.
15. The following work is currently being undertaken:
  - (a) 69 Housing schemes require a digital upgrade to the warden call, door entry and smoke protection systems. In 2022-23, we upgraded 3 of these schemes. In 2023-24, we have placed an order for a further 3 warden call systems and 38 digital communicators that will ensure there is hybrid digital connectivity at the other

schemes, as we work through our upgrade program.

- (b) Darlington's CCTV office required an upgrade to its analogue infrastructure and relocation of Lifeline's Disaster recovery site. In 2022-23, orders were placed for ISDN lines to enable CCTV to become a hybrid version of digital and continue to answer Lifeline's digital alarm calls, post migration. Additional resilience has been created with disaster recovery servers being installed at Bayheath House in Stockton, as a contingency to cope with any digital disruption or power outages.
- (c) Our Jontek/Answerlink database required an upgrade to a digitally enabled platform. Jontek is a dual functioning database and calls handling platform that is currently operating on an analogue format. Since 2023, we have been managing a project to upgrade the system to a web-based version capable of handling digital calls from the upgraded Lifeline/Telecare equipment.
- (d) 1,320 Lifeline clients required the digital upgrade of their box, pendant and Telecare. To date, we have transferred 954 of our customer's equipment from the traditional analogue system to the new IP ready dispersed/telecare range with a remaining 366 to complete by the switchover deadline in December 2025.

### **Dolphin Centre**

- 16. The Dolphin Centre's main pool opened on Friday 26 January following a 12-month closure for essential repair and has been welcoming customers back in great numbers. The toddler pool and new features, along with the remaining facilities, will be available for customers to enjoy in Summer 2024.
- 17. Half-term celebrated the reintroduction of the main pool, with families visiting to use the pool and diving boards from across Darlington and the northeast. The Centre's facilities including bowling, soft play and the Bistro have been extremely busy over this period.
- 18. The first phase of the hub online is now complete: a platform to improve the customer digital journey in making bookings online. Phase 2 has commenced, where portals will allow customers to check in for bookable facilities. This represents the first step in improvements for customers' online experience.

### **Haughton Matters Project**

- 19. Since January over 350 attendances have been recorded throughout the Health in Haughton Matters Project. A committee has been formed consisting of local residents and participants to be the driving force of the programme. This has been a contributing factor in the increase in attendances, supporting community-based consultation to offer activities that local residents want to engage with.
- 20. The Darlington Move More Team have started a programme of inclusive activities, following consultation workshops with partners at the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy workshops. Sessions have included walking, multi activity, relaxation sessions at Foundations, Lakeside Lodge and Richard Court and the Weight Goals Project at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The sessions have been exceptionally well attended and

further activities are planned in the near future.

### **Eastbourne Sports Complex Athletics Events**

21. Following the re-investment of Eastbourne Sports Complex Athletics Track, the track is now UK Athletics Track Mark accredited and can host regional athletics events again. The North Yorkshire South Durham track events will return to the site in June and August 2024, following a six-year absence, with the aim of attracting further events following the events in the summer.

**Councillor Matthew Roche**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing**