

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

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**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council the main areas of work undertaken under the Stronger Communities Portfolio are as follows:-

**All Member Portfolio Briefing**

2. The first all Member portfolio briefing took place on Tuesday 23 January 2024 and this covered the services with Community Safety. An overview of the service areas was provide and Members were invited to suggest areas where they would like further information on areas to assist with their community role. Future briefings are being scheduled to focus on the Members suggestions.

**Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

3. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends – Darlington:

<b>Darlington</b>	<b>YTD January 2023</b>	<b>YTD January 2024</b>	<b>% increase/decrease</b>
Crime	9605	10284	+7%
ASB	2296	1920	-16%

4. The crime increase equates to 679 offences, with vehicle crime, theft, theft of pedal cycle and shoplifting showing notable increases. The Police, together with partners have responded to the increase through crime prevention campaigns, dedicated and additional patrol, proactive operations and targeting suspects which has resulted in a significant number of arrests.
5. ASB has reduced by 376 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, continued partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.
6. Areas showing a current increase in ASB include Cockerton East, Hummersknott and Haughton North. Partners have increased patrols in these areas, targeted offenders and identified several individuals who are now subject of further investigation and intervention by the relevant services.

7. Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends - Darlington Town Centre

Darlington Town Centre	YTD January 2023	YTD January 2024	% Increase/decrease
Crime	1193	1232	+3.3%
ASB	200	146	-27%

8. Shoplifting and theft account for a significant amount of town centre crime. Shopwatch was re-launched on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and participation continues to grow with over 150 members involved in the crime reduction initiative.
9. The Police have issued crime prevention guidance to retailers that has helped to target, arrest and remand offenders.
10. The 'whatsapp group' allows Shopwatch members to communicate 'prevention' messages to each other, with intelligence being exchanged daily. The system has added advantages in relation to the identification and location of Missing People and those who resort to begging in the town centre.
11. ASB has reduced by 54 reports. This is believed to be a result of a combination of changed reporting requirements, continued partnership work and the Trailblazer project that targets high harm areas of ASB within Darlington.

**Call Handling – Police**

12. Call handling and response times by the Police have been a concern expressed by Members and the public and I have visited the centre and raised concerns directly with the Police and Police and Crime Commissioner. In terms of actions taken to improve this:
  - (a) Members receive monthly bulletins from the Darlington Neighbourhood Policing Inspector regarding Police Call Handling Performance.
  - (b) Over the last year the force has recruited an extra 29 call handlers and six switchboard staff to work in the Force Control Room, alongside a new switchboard triage system.
  - (c) Nine further call handlers are currently going through training and will join the Force Control Room later this month.
  - (d) There has been a significant investment in the Force Control Room.
  - (e) Durham Constabulary are also in the process of moving towards the Single Online Home website, which will allow members of the public to submit some queries and applications online, freeing up more Control Room staff to deal with 101 and 999 calls.
13. The actions have resulted in non-emergency calls being answered, on average, within 51 seconds. This marks a reduction of 81 per cent compared with March last year. Calls made to 999 have also showed a significant improvement.

**Funding and Initiatives**

14. The Home Office Trailblazer ASB Hotspot Patrol continues to cover eight areas in Darlington with increased engagement and patrols to reduce ASB. The areas include Park East, Stephenson, North Road, Northgate, Red Hall and Lingfield, Cockerton, Haughton and

Springfield and Bank Top and Lascelles.

15. During the reporting period the incidents of ASB were associated with nuisance around dwellings (9), incidents at the Hippodrome, DL1, Darlington Indoor Market and other commercial / retail premises in the town centre area. The outcomes were that:
  - (a) 2 young people received warnings in relation to reported anti-social behaviour,
  - (b) 5 received acceptable behaviour agreements, action has been taken against one young person for breach of proceedings.
  - (c) 17 young people are currently awaiting interview and potential intervention activity involving the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service.
  
16. Officers have continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes resulting in the following actions that aims to improve behaviour and encourage responsible waste management :
  - (a) 4 pending prosecutions,
  - (b) 2 fixed penalty notices,
  - (c) 1 community protection notice,
  - (d) 6 community protection warnings
  - (e) 13 "open file" investigations.
  
17. The application for Home Office Safer Streets has secured approval. Safer Streets Round 5 will focus on Neighbourhood Crime and ASB in Darlington Park East / Banktop and Rural Crime in Darlington West Villages / Middleton St George. The project is in the initial stages of commencement and provision has been approved for:
  - (a) the employment of two Rural Crime Co-ordinators, commenced 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024
  - (b) An Intelligence Officer, to commence April 2024
  - (c) Crime Prevention equipment including two 'Drones' which will improve aerial surveillance and improved specifications of two vehicles for use in a rural setting.
  
18. The Violence Prevention Fund has recently been launched by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner. Darlington's successful bids amount to £257,123 and include initiatives around stalking and harassment intervention, tackling domestic related abuse, supporting Number 40 and trauma informed care.
  
19. A UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid has been successful and secured £520,000 over the next two years. The range of initiatives includes the provision of community safety posts, parking officers, street cleaners, taxi marshals, the refurbishment of street furniture, marketing campaigns and extended opening of Number 40 to support members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

### **Operational Updates**

20. The Community safety team continue to deliver a range of activity, some notable priorities and highlights include:

- (a) Engagement with the Home Office Alcohol Related Crime and Homicide (ARCH) Taskforce to work alongside police in a national study to develop initiatives that will minimise alcohol related violence in the night-time economy.
- (b) Co-ordinating an approach for the XL Bully ban. Protocols have been developed between the local authority and Police working with key stakeholders to safeguard communities and staff, whilst ensuring animal welfare standards are maintained. The latest meeting Dog Watch focused on the XL Bully ban, local campaigns, dog exercise areas and future priorities for the group.
- (c) The sale and supply of illegal vaping products, as well as the sale and supply of vaping products to under-age children, are priorities for enforcement working in partnership with other law enforcement agencies.
- (d) Further analysis has also been completed to identify the correlation between Begging and Rough Sleeping. Representatives of the group have recently consulted HM Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) to promote greater awareness and understanding of the problem and joint multi-agency sweeps of the town have commenced.
- (e) Darlington has been awarded Purple Flag reaccreditation in recognition of its commitment to creating a dynamic, secure, and vibrant evening and night-time economy. This prestigious award highlights Darlington's blend of entertainment, dining, and culture, all while ensuring the safety and well-being of residents and visitors in the evening and night-time economy.

### **Resilient Communities and Engagement**

- 21. A drop-in session involving Council officers, Durham Constabulary Police Cohesion Unit and Darlington Neighbourhood Policing Team was held at North Lodge on Friday 26 January 2024. The event was scheduled to coincide with the end of prayers in the Mosque and promoted to the Muslim community as an opportunity to engage with Police and DBC about issues or concerns linked to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. One member of the public attended.
- 22. Staff promoted Number 40 as a volunteering opportunity at the Darlington Jobs Fair held on 8 February 2024.

### **Climate Change**

- 23. 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). There are currently 50 properties across the region being assessed for delivery.
- 24. The scheme will improve the energy efficiency of residential properties delivering measures such as solar panels and energy efficient heating such as air source heat pumps.

## **Equality and Inclusion**

25. Number Forty has extended its footprint in the Town by opening during Mongay nights. The opening occurs every second Monday of the month and provides support to LGBTQAI+ events and members of those diverse communities.

## **Darlington Cares**

26. In 2023, through the employees of its members, Darlington Cares delivered 7,879 hours of volunteering across its three areas of focus, environment and social justice. It also increased its membership by 5 to 27.
27. There has been a significant amount of activity supporting the Council's tree planting ambition whilst the Great Park Auction has resulted in thousands of hours of volunteering devoted to Darlington's parks. An event will be held on March 20<sup>th</sup> at the Hulaballoo to celebrate the achievements of the employers that took part.
28. Darlington Cares has also supported the Council in coordinating the volunteers at the Uniform Exchange Scheme which last year had 4393 customers and gave out 12,337 items of uniform.

## **Voluntary and Community Sector**

29. A collaboration of voluntary sector organisations has been delivering a range of supports for the Council under the Household Support Fund provided by the DWP. The objective of The Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs. Management Information returns submitted to the end of December 2023 indicate that, by the end of the financial year, voluntary sector providers will have fully deployed the £1,827,708 allocated to Darlington and the targets set out in the delivery plan will be met. A fuller report will be provided at the end of the financial year.

**Councillor Dr Amanda Riley**  
**Stronger Communities Portfolio**