

**COUNCIL**  
**26 SEPTEMBER 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council the updates for the Stronger Communities Portfolio are as follows:

**National Unrest**

2. The violence, in towns and cities across England and in Northern Ireland, was fuelled by misinformation online following the tragic incident in Southport. The unrest manifested in Darlington on the 5 August.
3. The Police lead the response and the Council and partners provided coordinated support. The focus of the unrest in Darlington was around the North Lodge and Gladstone Street area. Thankfully, there were no injuries, but several arrests were made for violent disorder and those have been dealt with swiftly through the Court system. The Leader and I have thanked staff who stepped up during this challenging period of unrest.
4. During the period of unrest contact was made with leaders of communities where our residents were feeling extremely nervous and concerned. Following the initial periods of unrest funding has been made available to areas where physical recovery is needed, this is not the case in Darlington. However, monitoring and engagement activity continues in numerous guises across a number of organisations to try to restore confidence, provide education and reassurance to communities and reduce any community tension that exists. The Council recognises that this will be an ongoing process.

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

5. As previously reported the parameters in relation to crime and ASB have changed over recent years, like for like comparisons between years are becoming more comparable in terms of reporting criteria.

**Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends – Darlington**

<b>Darlington</b>	<b>YTD July 2023</b>	<b>YTD July 2024</b>
Crime	4337	3763
ASB	849	932

6. The combined total of incidents across Darlington has reduced by a total of 491 incidents when compared to the previous year.

## Incidents specific to Darlington Town Centre

Darlington Town Centre	YTD July 2023	YTD July 2024
Crime	392	379
ASB	59	98

7. The combined total of Crime and ASB across Darlington town centre has increased by a total of 26 incidents when compared to the previous year.

### Analysis of Crime statistics and patterns

8. Despite there being a reduction in crime overall some specific areas of crime are showing an increase, these include burglary (156 to 165), vehicle crime (222 to 246) and shoplifting (427 to 484), but retail crime in the town centre has reduced by 9% (133 to 103).
9. The Police, together with partners have responded through crime prevention campaigns, dedicated and additional patrols, proactive operations, use of criminal powers and targeting suspects which has resulted in arrests.

### Analysis of ASB statistics

10. Analysis shows some specific geographic areas are seeing elevated levels of ASB when compared to last year. Town Centre (59 to 98), North Road (280 to 305) and East (263 to 290). There was a specific incident that may have affected the figures and that related to a group of youths gathering in Tommy Crooks Park and moving into the Town Centre.
11. 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.

### Interventions

12. Shopwatch continues to exchange information and intelligence. Investigations are underway to look at a system whereby all retail/businesses in the town have a means of communication outside of the 'shopwatch membership'. The group will continue reassurance work and support businesses as part of ongoing work in relation to the recent unrest.
13. Youth related incidents have reduced by 18% (808 to 663) and Youth/alcohol related incidents have reduced by 19% (52 to 42). Our Early Intervention and Prevention offer has been enhanced following the MoJ 'Turnaround' grant and Home Office 'Immediate Justice' investment. Referrals into this pathway gives opportunity for earlier intervention.
14. The Young People's Engagement and Justice Service have received 20 referrals into the Early Intervention and Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team during this reporting period. Since the programme began in July 2023 there have been a total of 226 referrals in from Police, Civic Enforcement and Children's Initial Advice Team. Only 7 children have gone on to commit an offence and subsequently entered the judicial process.

15. Future Pathways ASB evening sessions have commenced a second cohort on 26 June and all 22 places are filled, this cohort runs until week commencing 26 August.
16. Work continues to intervene and steer young people away from ASB and crime:
  - (a) 5 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
  - (b) 2 committed ABA breaches and these are being followed up.
  - (c) 20 young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention
  - (d) 15 young people are awaiting interview
  - (e) Increased patrols have been undertaken in hotspot areas.
17. In addition to ASB related activity the Civic Enforcement team have increased parking enforcement activity in all areas, but particularly in the town centre and resident parking areas where a number of complaints have been received. Officers have also continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes, the figures below provide an overview of activity:
  - (a) 44 environmental cases have been received (of which 34 have been closed)
  - (b) 4 successful prosecutions
  - (c) 10 case files submitted to legal
  - (d) 13 Community Protection Warnings issued
18. Over recent months there has been an increase in reports of begging in the town centre. A new communication plan involving the provision of posters has also been produced to tackle the problems associated with begging in the town centre. The involvement of the Integrated Management Unit of the police to manage those people who continue to beg, despite all forms of support, coaching and advice is proving beneficial.

### **Licensing**

19. Two people (mother and son) prosecuted by Licensing for unlicensed dog breeding/selling animals. Both were fined and given a five-year ban for keeping animals. These convictions follow a series of prosecutions targeting criminals who exploit animals for profit.
20. On 13 August, Uber were granted a licence to operate private hire vehicles in Darlington. Uber vehicles from Stockton and Durham can already be seen in Darlington as they can lawfully take cross border bookings.

### **Trading Standards**

21. A multi-agency operation targeting two licensed restaurants involved in organised crime found a number of illegal workers. Two further people were safeguarded from exploitation. These premises will be subject to a full licence review when papers are submitted by Home Office Immigration Enforcement.
22. Trading Standards undertook a joint visit with a vet to check on farm animals following up on a report of welfare concerns.

23. Op Nightstar work around the supply of illegal cigarettes and vapes with a focus on potential child sexual exploitation concerns ended on 31 March with the last day of action under this banner taking place on 4 April 2024. Investigations have continued under Operation Oracle with test purchase operations and inspection visits to problem retailers. Cash, illegal vapes and cigarettes have been seized from several stores. Vehicles used as storage for illegal goods have been seized.
24. Premise Closure Orders were granted by the Courts in relation to two problem retailers. Further closure order requests will be heard by the Courts in late August.
25. Our Routine Inspections of Darlington businesses are now well underway with visits planned to problem traders and high-risk businesses taking place.

## **Private Sector Housing and Update on Climate Change**

### **Great British Insulation Scheme and ECO4 flex**

26. 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.
27. Great British Insulation Scheme and ECO4 Flex are household referral mechanisms within ECO wider schemes, which enable Local Authorities to widen eligibility criteria for properties to receive energy efficiency measures. This allows participating local authorities to include households they consider to be living in fuel poverty or on a low income or those vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home, who may not qualify for the schemes via the standard eligibility criteria.
28. Under this scheme, the team have issued 247 declarations. These works have generally improved the Energy Performance Certificate rating by two bands in each property treated.

### **Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2)**

29. Following a successful bid in January 2023, a scheme to improve energy inefficient properties, funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, has commenced across the area by our delivery partners ESH Construction.
30. The project is being led by Darlington Borough Council, under a partnership name of Home Energy Efficiency Tees Valley (HEET) aims to improve properties that are not heated by gas appliances across the Tees Valley.
31. There are approximately 9,000 potentially eligible properties across the area with around 2,800 in Darlington that could benefit from measures such as external wall insulation or solar panels.

### **Darlington Cares**

32. Darlington Cares is set to deliver 10,000 hours of volunteering through its members volunteers. These cover schemes supporting education, environment and social justice. EE has embarked on a programme working in the Denes alongside The Friends of The Denes.
33. Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership will be holding two events in the autumn: a 'network and learn' event at Teesside University's Net Zero centre and an event for Darlington's small businesses to help them access support in starting work on net zero.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

34. The Council continues to engage effectively with voluntary and community sector through the engagement group chaired by Inclusion North. It has three subgroups, children and young people, social inclusion and financial inclusion. It is embarking on a major piece of work looking at vulnerability and how agencies across the public and voluntary sectors can provide better support and points where people are prone to becoming vulnerable.
35. At its last meeting the Head of Community Safety attended the group as it considered the riots. The group are keen to be involved in any work going forward which supports groups made to feel vulnerable and to promote inclusion.

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