

COUNCIL
28 NOVEMBER 2024

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

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. Harrogate and District Foundation Trust, provider of the 0-19 public health service, has retained their gold status for the UNICEF breastfeeding award, which is a great achievement. The team continue to offer support to parents to continue their breastfeeding journey, not only in the home but with an outreach offer. They also continue to promote the Darlington breastfeeding friendly accreditation scheme to local organisations. The Dolphin Centre and Hippodrome are already adopters of this award.
3. Dame Carol Black, who carried out the independent national review on drugs which led to the 10-year strategy From Harm to Hope, alongside Andrew Brown, Head of Drug and Alcohol Improvement, came to visit Darlington on 11 September to see in practice how an effective partnership can make a real difference in enhancing the delivery of treatment and recovery services. They met with delegates from the Council, treatment and recovery workers and people who have previously/are currently receiving support, whilst visiting both Tubwell Row and Coniscliffe Road sites. Feedback received from both Dame Carol and Andrew Brown referenced the great way that the Council work with our Provider Managers and their teams to create a very integrated treatment and recovery system. They also expressed their appreciation for the open way that we approached the visit.
4. As previously shared Darlington has been selected as a case study site for the independent evaluation of the Drug Strategy Investment in Treatment and Recovery (D-SITAR) and it has now been confirmed that research staff will be visiting Darlington from 18 November for a week of interviews and focus groups. Case study sites have been selected to provide variation in terms of geography, rurality/urbanity, populations, treatment needs, and services/support that have been implemented through the drug strategy. The purpose of case studies is not to rank Local Authorities (LA), or to identify high and low performing LAs in terms of their implementation of the portfolio, but to maximise diversity in terms of how LAs are using the Drug Strategy funding to improve treatment and recovery services.
5. Our STRIDE recovery provision delivered via Recovery Connections has seen a welcome expansion of recovery activity within the borough, which has resulted in the team being nominated for a Stronger Communities Award and shortlisted as a finalist in the category; Contribution to the Community.
6. The winter months can be a difficult time for health and wellbeing, especially as the days get shorter and colder and people tend to spend more time indoors, which means

infectious diseases can spread more easily. Cold weather can worsen health issues and lead to serious complications, especially amongst those who may need extra support during winter, such as people aged 65 or older, or those with ongoing health conditions like heart or kidney disease, chest and breathing conditions, or diabetes.

7. The NHS recommends five simple things we can all do to ensure we keep ourselves and our families well over the winter months and reduce our chances of becoming unwell. These include:
 - (a) Make sure you get your flu jab. Check with your doctor what jabs you are due.
 - (b) Keep your home warm as you can.
 - (c) Contact NHS 111 if you are worried about any symptoms.
 - (d) Stock up on medicines at home. Make sure you have your prescription medicines ordered before any holidays.
 - (e) Look out for other people who may need a bit of extra help over the winter. This includes friends, family and neighbours.
8. The autumn/winter immunisation campaign is well underway. Whilst local data is not yet available for the full programme there is some early data available for the school-based flu programme in Darlington, which shows that after five weeks (commenced 16 September) coverage is 48 per cent in primary schools and 40 per cent in secondary schools. The school programme runs until 15 December.
9. Across the North East and North Cumbria footprint early indications are the overall programme is going well, with good early uptake for flu and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). However, uptake of Covid-19 vaccination is proving more challenging. The Covid seasonal programme will end on 20 December, flu continues to 31 March 2025 and the RSV vaccine is offered all year round, to those who become eligible either because they turn 75 years of age or are pregnant.

Health and Well Being Board

10. The Health and Wellbeing Board received the 2023/24 Director of Public Health Annual Report, which was focused on Women's Health. There was a helpful discussion of the key findings and recommendations of the report. Implementation of the recommendations will be monitored going forward, with some recommendations included as priorities within the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
11. It is a statutory duty of the Health and Wellbeing Board to develop a Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS). At the meeting of the Board in September a draft JLHWS was shared, setting out the local priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of the population of Darlington. The JLHWS sets out the vision that Darlington is a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and live well and has adopted a life course approach. Following feedback on the draft Strategy a final version will be taken to the December meeting of the Board, for approval.

Housing Services

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

12. Consultation on our new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2025-2030 is now open, and has been developed by our Housing Services team, with the support of local partners and organisations including commissioning, adult and children's services, health, probation, police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector. It aims to be, not just a council document, but one that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington.
13. Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is a huge issue at both national and local levels. This strategy sets out our ambition to meet the challenges, working in partnership with local providers and others to deliver better outcomes for our residents. Everyone in Darlington should have a secure, affordable place to call home, but such are the challenges at present this is not something we can manage on our own. We need to build upon the relationships we already have, and I'd like to thank all those who have contributed to the new strategy so far, telling us what you think of our current work and sharing your ideas on how we can improve.
14. The strategy sets out our long-term vision, which is simple yet ambitious:
 - (a) To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington
 - (b) That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home
 - (c) That the right support is in place at the right time
 - (d) Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Rent Collection and Universal Credit

15. As at the end of September 2024, our Council Housing rent arrears was £892,923 which is 2.88 per cent of our overall rent debit. Our Housing Services team has collected £15.7 million so far, which equates to a 99.63 per cent collection rate. Last year at the same point, the rent arrears were 2.94 per cent of the overall rent debit and we had collected £14.8 million, which was a 98.78 per cent collection rate.
16. The number of Council tenants receiving Universal Credit now stands at 2,198. The managed migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit is now being rolled out by the Department for Work and Pensions to Darlington residents. 105 Council Tenants have migrated to Universal Credit since April 2024 and all of these have been contacted by our Tenancy Sustainment team, who can provide advice, assistance and support with the process. The average rent arrears for Council tenants receiving Universal Credit are currently £440.39 which is less than five weeks' average rent (remembering that Universal Credit is paid one month in arrears).

Afghan Refugees

17. Our Refugee Support team, based in Housing Services, are actively supporting new Afghan refugee families, placed in Darlington by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). As part of the Government's Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), the MoD are resettling Afghan families into the UK, previously based in temporary accommodation abroad. The ARAP scheme acknowledges and reflects the potential risks to Afghanistan local staff who had previously worked for the UK Government.
18. Our Refugee Support team will be providing much-needed integration support for those arriving and helping them settle in Darlington. Funding is being provided to the Council by the MoD to fund all support activities and we will continue to work with national and local partners to make this process of resettlement a success.

Fire Safety

19. Our Housing Services team are currently developing a new fire safety policy for blocks of flats. In December 2022 Cabinet approved a new fire safety policy for sheltered and extra care schemes and this work of updating our policies and procedures in this important area continues, taking into consideration the recommendations from the Grenfell enquiry.
20. As part of the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022, the work to replace all our fire doors in blocks of flats, sheltered schemes and extra care schemes continues in line with our planned programme. To date, 215 new fire doors have been installed, with 1,174 planned over the next three years. The new regulations also require these doors to be inspected on an annual basis by a suitably qualified surveyor from our Building Surveying team, and this work will commence in January 2025 and will be monitored on a quarterly basis by our Housing Asset and Compliance team.

Tenant Involvement

21. I am pleased to report that our Housing Services Tenants Panel has recently been recognised by the Tenant Participation Advisory Services (TPAS) under their Engagement Heroes Awards. TPAS recognised our Tenants Panel for their "outstanding and valuable contribution to their local community" and reflects the important role they play in shaping and delivering services for our tenants.

Dolphin Centre

22. Swimming lessons are currently accommodating over 900 children to swim, the highest number since 2019. The Dolphin Centre Swim4Life Scheme is based upon a framework known as the National Plan for Teaching Swimming, produced by Swim England, the UK's National Governing Body for all Aquatic Disciplines.
23. The Dolphin Centre events season has had a busy start with new events added to the calendar and repeat events returning. On Sunday 29 September, the Dolphin Centre hosted the prestigious BBC Make a Difference Awards in Central Hall with people from all over the region attending. The awards are a chance to say thank you and show recognition and appreciation for people who love to make life better for others. Nominations were made across England with ceremonies taking place in each region and

over 200 attending the event in Darlington.

24. The United Dance Organisation also returned to the Dolphin Centre on Sunday 13 October in the main hall with over 600 spectators attending from all over the country, bringing a large footfall of visitors to the town centre.
25. October half term welcomed families from Darlington and the North East to enjoy full swimming facilities including slides, diving boards and the toddler pool following the reopening of the complex after extensive repair works. Bowling, soft play, and hospitality were busy, including family favourites such as Halloween parties in soft play, facepainting and Halloween themed music around the building.

Holiday Activity Programme

26. The HAF programme (Holiday Activities and Food) is for children who are eligible for benefits related free school meals. The programme ran for five weeks over the summer holidays with a vast geographical spread across the town. Over 5,000 places were booked for children aged 5-16 years of age and 1,032 free school meal children attended.
27. The team engaged 21 per cent of SEND children and a specialist SEND programme ran for five days at Beaumont Hill Academy. The programme had a digital presence in the town and was promoted on social media. A wide variety of physical and enrichment activities were provided, including NE Wake Park, Learn to Ride, Forest School, Junior First Aid and Surfing. New activities were introduced, including a visit to Hopetown Darlington and over 60 providers were used. The children were provided with a healthy meal whilst attending the programme.

Eastbourne Sports Complex

28. Eastbourne Sports Complex capital project is now complete and the new state of the art facilities and investment has seen a significant increase in visits to the site with over 243,000 visits from April to September 2024. The team are now exploring potential football foundation applications for a new clubhouse on the new artificial grass pitch and funding to improve the wider grass pitches that would support a further increase of visits to the site.

Health in Haughton Matters Project

29. The Health in Haughton Matters Project continues to provide high quality sport and physical activity sessions for the residents of Haughton. The group have recently applied to the National Lottery Awards for All grant for £20,000 to further expand the project.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing