

**COUNCIL**  
**30 JANUARY 2025**

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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:

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

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends for all Darlington

Darlington	YTD Nov 2023	YTD Nov 2024
Crime	8333	7208
ASB	1647	1800

**Crime**

2. The year-to-date figure is significantly lower than the same period last year, by 14%. Aspects of crime being showing increasing trends are burglary, shoplifting, racially aggravated crime, drugs and possession of weapons. All reported incidents of violence reduced to varying amounts (average 19%) and harassment reduced by 25%.
3. The Police, together with partners, have responded through crime prevention campaigns; The annual Winter Nights Campaign which focuses upon acquisitive crime has begun, with additional media coverage upon the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the CCTV facilities in Darlington, Begging and promotion of Number 40 to attract additional volunteers.

**ASB**

4. The year-to-date figure is higher than the same period last year. During the reporting period there was an increase in anti-social behaviour over a period of time associated with a gathering of youths travelling from outside the area into the Town Centre and causing significant issues of ASB. Additional measures were introduced to combat the ASB including a Police led ASB - Dispersal Order relevant to the town centre, additional uniformed staff on patrol, increased youth intervention work (YES), increased staffing within CCTV room and civic enforcement remedies being progressed against key individuals.
5. During the reporting period the Young People's Engagement & Justice Service have received 27 referrals into the Early Intervention & Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team.
6. Future Pathways ASB evening sessions continue and the provision is now engaging with cohort 4 with a total of 12 young people referred and 10 active referrals at this current period.

7. Between 23 October 2024 and 4 December 2024.
  - (a) 3 young people received first warnings for ASB
  - (b) 4 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
  - (c) 7 committed ABA breaches
  - (d) 4 young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention
  - (e) 12 young people are awaiting interview
  - (f) 1 Young person has a pending Civil Injunction

### **Other Operational Updates**

8. Feedback from managers at council venues confirms there have been very few reported instances of customers feeling unsafe or being victims of inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour within those venues. To date issues have been addressed on a case by case basis. We are pleased the vast majority of people have positive experiences in our venues, but to ensure we have an accurate and holistic understanding of our customers experiences, specifically in relation to feeling and being safe, a council wide approach is being established to record any reported issues. This information will be used to assess and understand any emerging patterns of unacceptable behaviour, and to help building managers introduce appropriate interventions if needed.

### **Parking Facilities**

9. The replacement programme, which will allow the facility for all 'on-street' machines to take payment by card, and parking app has been completed.
10. The Town Hall, Archer Street, Commercial Street West, Kendrew Street East, Kendrew Street West and Park Place East car parks have been reassessed and secured the Safer Parking Award, which demonstrates the facility provides Police accredited parking in relation to quality management, effective surveillance, appropriate lighting and a clean environment.

### **Environmental Crime**

11. Since the last reporting period officers have continued to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes, the figures below provide an overview of activity:
  - (a) 85 enviro crime cases (of which 67 closed)
  - (b) 5 Fixed Penalty Notices issued (3 for fly tipping, 1 for household duty of care and 1 for failing to produce waste transfer notes)
  - (c) 16 Community Protection Warnings (CPN) issued

- (d) 2 Community Protection Notices (CPN) issued
- (e) A company director was prosecuted for 4 offences (2 S34 duty of care and 2 transporting waste for profit without a licence)
- (f) A householder was prosecuted for breach of a CPN
- (g) 3 individuals were prosecuted for obstructing investigations – 1 was ordered to pay £1192.70
- (h) Trail cameras to improve CCTV deployment options are being used

### **Begging Incidents**

12. Begging incidents between July and November 2024 show a significant decrease from 38 in July to 11 in November. There has been dedicated patrols and joined up partnership working.
13. There is currently a cohort of 10 people begging whom we are engaging with through all available support mechanism. The following support has been offered through our dedicated 'out-reach work' during this financial year:-
  - (a) 16 individuals have been engaged on over 314 occasions.
  - (b) 14 referrals made to Housing support and five people allocated secured accommodation.
  - (c) 112 occasions whereby financial support and advice regarding benefits provided.
  - (d) 20 referrals made to support the physical and mental health of those begging including GP referrals.
  - (e) 29 referrals made to support groups and agencies managing addictions.
  - (f) 261 occasions where support has been directly provided for foodstuffs and nutrition.
14. The council continue to promote public information in relation to begging through media and marketing.

### **Licensing**

15. A couple have been summoned to Peterlee Magistrates Court for breeding/selling dogs without a licence. These offences came to light when a pup that was sold by them died from suspected parvo virus. Numerous litters of pups had been sold by the couple since 2017. They pleaded not guilty, and a trial has been fixed for 19 March 2025
16. A Pre-Christmas nighttime taxi enforcement operation was carried out to check vehicle safety and driver documentation. This was in collaboration with Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary. During the operation 57 vehicles were examined, of which two in Darlington were immediately suspended following safety concerns.

17. A revised pavement café policy has been approved for public consultation by the Licensing Committee. There are several proposed amendments that will assist the hospitality trade and maintain their vibrancy. It will also bring the policy in line with the Business and Planning Act that was made permanent in 2024.
18. Planning has begun on new Animal Welfare (Primate Licences) (England) Regulations 2024. There will be a phased introduction of these regulations in 2025 to be fully implemented in April 2026.

### **Trading Standards**

19. Trading Standards will always try to engage with business owners and landlords of businesses found to be selling illegal vapes or counterfeit cigarettes. A three-month premise closure order due to expire was granted a further three-month extension by the Magistrates Court until February due to a lack of engagement with the Council who believed that the illegal activity would recommence as soon as the closure order expired.
20. Trading Standards are working hard to complete the majority of their annual programmed inspections before the end of the financial year.
21. Street sellers of counterfeit perfumes have been a problem however swift action by CCTV, Civic Enforcement and a visit from Trading Standards to seize the illegal goods has kept such matters to a minimum. A press release and radio interview have ensured that the wider message around spending money wisely and how to avoid purchasing unsafe or counterfeit goods is available to the public.
22. All premises licensed to store explosives with Darlington Borough Council have been inspected by the Trading Standards team. The premises are principally fireworks retailers so additional checks on age verification processes and staff training were made to ensure consumer safety.

### **Darlington Cares**

23. At the last Board meeting plans were agreed to work with the careers leads of Darlington's secondary schools so that there is an easier structured way for schools to engage with businesses in Darlington. Employer in lessons, Assemblies Employability workshops Apprentice visit or talks, Enterprise activity, Careers clubs, providing work experience opportunities.
24. During Covid, similar, to other voluntary organisations, Darlington Cares found that levels of volunteering fell significantly. However, there has been a steady recovery and during 2024, 10,000 hours of volunteering have been delivered across the three focuses of environment, education and social justice.
25. As in previous years, through Darlington Cares, a Volunteer Fair will be held in the Dolphin Centre Sports Hall on Tuesday 4 February between 1.00 pm and 4.00 pm. The event allows people who are considering volunteering to meet with the voluntary and community organisations of Darlington.

### **Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership (DEEP)**

26. DEEP which was set up in 2023 and is administered by Darlington Cares is a local initiative that encourages businesses to work together to tackle climate change and achieve net zero targets. Membership continues to grow with Latimer Hinks being the latest company to join.
27. DEEP hold a series of network and learn events with the next one to be held at Hopetown on January 29, 2025. In addition, a 'market place' event is to be held on 21 February in Central Hall where businesses can connect with local providers of Net Zero solutions helping them reduce their carbon footprint.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

28. The Council maintains a strong and productive relationship with the voluntary and community sector through the VCSE engagement group.
29. Local voluntary sector organisations are delivering elements of the Household Support Fund, targeting households struggling the most using the Low-Income Family Tracker. New to this round, Citizen's Advice Bureau are administering a fund helping those who are struggling with significant debt which is open to application through their website.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

30. Work is ongoing to understand the requirements on the council for the provision of single sex spaces. Feedback has been gathered from several groups and individuals to help us understand their perspectives on the matter, but the Council's position must be aligned with legislation. To date, current legislation is being interpreted in different ways at both local and national levels. The main issue to overcome is the definition of sex within the Equality Act 2010, and we are monitoring two legal cases currently going through the courts (Nurses vs. County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, and For Women Scotland Ltd vs. The Scottish Ministers). The outcome from these cases may lead to case law which in turn may help to inform the council's position.

**Councillor Jim Garner**  
**Stronger Communities Portfolio**