

OVERVIEW OF HOUSING, HEALTH AND PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Housing, Health and Partnerships Portfolio were as follows:-

Public Health

1. The NHS Health Checks contract has been successfully awarded and mobilisation will commence during February and March with the service going live from 1 April 2019.
2. Darlington Borough Council runs a Healthy Lifestyle Survey annually. The results of the self-reported survey helps schools, and services respond to local issues. The survey has been completed by over 6,000 pupils across 23 primary and seven secondary schools during the autumn and winter terms.
3. Darlington has been successful, along with Durham, Tees, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby CCG areas in gaining, via a bidding process, some resource for suicide prevention from NHS England. The resource will support a national initiative to reduce suicide rates in England by 10 per cent by 2020-21. The local funding will be used to build on the work already underway in Darlington through the Darlington Suicide Prevention Plan. Part of the funding will support a grass roots grant fund, launched in December 2018.
4. Today, Thursday the 31, marks the end of Dry January! Well done to all who took part. Evidence shows us that 72 per cent of people who are alcohol free as part of Dry January have long term positive benefits.

Health and Well Being Board

5. I chaired the meeting of the Health and Well Being Board held on 17 January 2019, at which a 'stocktake' was undertaken on the progress of the Board's priorities, since it adopted the 'life course' approach. The current Terms of Reference were also considered by the Board and Members were requested to consider what further changes they wished to make, if any, to those Terms of Reference.
6. A number of urgent/usual business reports were also considered at the meeting including a report on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy and High Needs Funding, an update from Healthwatch Darlington and a verbal update from the Clinical Commissioning Group on the Integrated Care System

Universal Credit

7. In June 2018, the Universal Credit 'full-service' commenced in Darlington. This means that most people of working age making a new claim for benefit (including Housing Benefit paid by the Council) will now claim Universal Credit from the

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This has started the process of moving everyone onto Universal Credit, which is due to be completed by 2023.

8. Darlington Borough Council has been working with the DWP and other agencies to ensure that residents receive the right information, advice and support to help them claim Universal Credit and maintain their tenancies. A dedicated team of Tenancy Sustainment Officers has been specifically recruited to assist Council Tenants with the transition to Universal Credit.
9. Since the implementation of the full service, the number of people receiving Universal Credit in Darlington has increased from 993 in June 2018 to 3,067 in November 2018. Council Tenant rent arrears have increased from £567k in June 2018 to £772k in December 2018. This increase is partly due to the way in which Universal Credit is paid; monthly in arrears. All tenants moving onto Universal Credit are offered support to manage their finances and sustain their tenancies. In some cases, the Council can also apply to the DWP to have the housing costs element of Universal Credit paid directly to the Council.
10. Further information about Universal Credit is available at: www.gov.uk/universal-credit.

Begging

11. As part of a multi-agency approach to begging, Housing Options are joining with the Community Safety Team, statutory and voluntary organisations in a 'Have a heart, give smart' campaign. The purpose is to encourage the public to donate to charities rather than give money to beggars. There is an assumption that anyone who is begging is homeless. Everyone who is found to be begging is approached to see what assistance can be given to them by a project run by the 700 Club. They have found that virtually all of those begging in the town centre have a home. In a number of cases they do have other problems such as addictions and assistance is always offered. The campaign therefore is intended to divert donations to charities who work with people who have these problems.

Community Fund

Red Hall

12. The Friends of Red Hall ran a successful Christmas event for the community. They again linked with Stockton International Festival who provided a number of circus acts as part of an afternoon of entertainment that included food and presents for the children.
13. Housing Officers supported the Primary school's Christmas celebrations and provided two Christmas Hampers for a prize draw. The hampers were financed from the Community Fund and included ingredients for a full Christmas Dinner as well as other goods donated by a local supermarket. A residents survey was also held. Feedback was very positive, particularly in respect of improvements to the housing, play facilities and increased social events/community activities.

Firthmoor

14. Housing staff supported Firthmoor's Christmas celebration. Selection boxes were provided for children funded from the Community Fund.

Cockerton Play Area

15. An event was held for families at Windsor Court. This was an opportunity to provide some food and activities for children during the school holiday. It was also an opportunity to discuss with residents the plans for a second phase of development. A number of volunteers have now come forward who will help to form a group to develop the second phase and fund raise.

Customer Engagement Survey

16. As part of a review of tenant engagement a survey of tenants was carried out in the Housing Connect Magazine to find out if tenants wanted to get involved in the way the housing service is planned and delivered. It found that a significant proportion of tenants were interested in improving their community. Just over half the tenants who responded were already involved in some form of voluntary work and 65 per cent said they would be more interested in getting more involved with the Housing Service. The top three issues were: improving the local area, tackling ASB and repairs. However it is clear the way that tenants want to get involved is changing. The most popular way tenants want to get involved and engage with us is on line.

Councillor A Scott
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Partnerships