

COUNCIL
27 MARCH 2025

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

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 Jan 2024	YTD Jan 2025
Crime	10234	8686
ASB	1922	2172

Crime

2. The year-to-date figure is significantly lower than the same period last year, by 15.1%. Reported incidents of violence show a significant decrease of on average (18%) and harassment reduced by 23.6%. Criminal damage and arson also show a significant decrease of over 18%.
3. The police along with partners have continued their crime prevention campaigns; The Winter Nights Campaign focussing upon acquisitive crime has continued throughout this period.

ASB

4. The year-to-date figure is higher than the same period last year (13%). 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. Additional measures were introduced to address the ASB including a Police led ASB Dispersal Order, additional uniformed staff on patrol, increased youth intervention work (YES), increased staffing within CCTV room and increased civic enforcement.
5. A number of individuals have been identified and the Young Peoples Engagement & Justice Service have received seven referrals into the Early Intervention and Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team.
6. Future Pathways ASB evening sessions continue, and Cohort 5 commenced on 10 February with a total of 25 young people referred.
7. During the reporting period:
 - (a) Ten young people received first warnings for ASB.

- (b) Seven young person received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA).
- (c) Six ABA breaches, five of these from the same individual who has a Civil Injunction pending.
- (d) Seven young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young People's Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention.
- (e) Two young people are awaiting interview.
- (f) Two young people have a pending Civil Injunction.

Other Operational Updates

Parking Facilities

8. All Council car parks (excluding East Street) 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

9. 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) 856 enviro crime cases (of which 46 closed).
 - (b) One Fixed Penalty Notices issued.
 - (c) A roofing company was fined a total of £1674 for a fly-tipping offence.
10. Trail cameras have been purchased to improve CCTV deployment in areas within Northgate and North Road where fly-tipping is most prevalent.

Begging Incidents

11. Begging incidents between November 2024 and January 2025 show a decrease of 13 recorded incidents compared to the same period the previous year. There have been dedicated patrols and joined-up partnership working.
12. There is currently a cohort of 14 people begging whom we are engaging with through all available support mechanisms. The following support has been offered through our dedicated 'out-reach work' in November and December 2024: -
 - (a) Eighteen individuals have been engaged on over 71 occasions.
 - (b) Two referrals made to Housing support and one person housed in private rented accommodation.

- (c) Regular check-ins that they still have benefits in place and no sanctions have been issued. Also discuss ensuring they pay their rent for those in accommodation.
 - (d) Several referrals made to support the physical and mental health of those begging including GP referrals, engagement with We Are With You (WAWY), and Recovery Connection Groups.
 - (e) Support has been directly provided for foodstuffs and nutrition signposting.
13. Several media campaigns have been initiated through podcast, social media posts and inside the front page of One Darlington magazine winter edition. These strategies are aimed at educating residents and prevent begging activity within Darlington.

Licensing

14. Licensing coordinated a cross-border taxi safety operation over the festive period and working with Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary they carried out safety checks on taxi and private hire vehicles. They were also looking out for unlicensed vehicles. Fifteen vehicles were directed to Darlington's in-house garage for further, more detailed checks and two of those were suspended until defects were rectified. There are plans for more of these operations during 2025.
15. Darlington's Licensing Committee approved a revised Pavement Café Policy for public consultation. The new policy will bring it in line with recent changes to legislation and in response to a change in the dynamics of the licensed trade since Covid-19. The response rate has been very good with mixed views on whether smoking/vaping should be allowed. The Licensing Committee will consider all responses before a final draft is submitted to Full Council for the new policy to be adopted.
16. Licensing have commenced a review of Darlington's Taxi and Private Hire Policy, and a report will be presented to the Licensing Committee to approve public consultation. Proposed changes to the policy are in line with the Department for Transport's revised Best Practice Guide, which was published after the last policy review.

Trading Standards

17. The Trading Standards Team have put out several press releases to keep Darlington residents up to date including updates on their efforts to tackle the supply of illegal vapes. They have also advised on the latest bird flu restrictions so that those keeping birds are fully aware of their obligations.
18. The team continue to visit problem traders involved in the supply of illegal vapes and cigarettes, particularly where there is information from the public around sales to children. Inspections to business premises continue and the team are on target to complete their programmed inspections for this year, which targeted problem sectors.
19. Information has been sent out to all small businesses in Darlington who may supply corrosive substances, offering advice on selling chemicals responsibly.

20. The team continue to visit Darlington Farmers Auction Mart to check on animal welfare during transport and whilst at the Mart. They have also undertaken visits to farms and smallholdings, as both routine inspections and as a result of concerns expressed by members of the public.
21. The Trading Standards Manager has been invited and will present at the North East Serious and Organised Crime Conference on the excellent work undertaken by the team in developing a multi-agency approach to tackling the multiple issues around the supply of illegal vapes particularly to children.

Darlington Cares

22. At the meeting of 14 February 2025 Darlington Cares Board agreed plans to roll out a programme creating opportunities for employers to engage with schools in informing and exciting students in their career choices. A register is being created of employers, detailing the type of activity they would like to participate in and details of the appropriate contact. School's Careers Information Advice and Guidance leads can then make contact and arrange events, keeping a record of outcomes. Darlington Cares members are currently being surveyed before the programme is rolled out further.
23. On Friday 21 February 2025 the Darlington Employers' Environmental Partnership (DEEP) staged its first Net Zero Marketplace Event, enabling a host of businesses to network, share knowledge, and display sustainable products and initiatives.
24. DEEP, with its administration provided by Darlington Cares, was formed at the start of 2024 to enable businesses and other organisations in the Darlington area to work together on environmental challenges.
25. The marketplace event was opened at the Dolphin Centre by Darlington MP Lola McEvoy, who congratulated the businesses on the initiative, which is thought to be the first partnership of its kind in the country.
26. Three new businesses – Willmott Dixon, SSE, and Chestnut Biopolymers – joined DEEP on the day, taking the membership to 38 companies and organisations.

Voluntary and Community Sector

27. As in previous rounds, a collaboration of Darlington's voluntary organisations are supporting the Council in delivering the DWP Household Support Fund.
28. Households experiencing both fuel and food poverty, identified by the Low-Income Family Tracker, have been targeted first. Pensioners eligible for pension credits but not claiming and pensioners close to the threshold were targeted in January. Full details of numbers of household supported will be available in April once the programme is fully delivered.

Benefit Enquiry Action Team

29. Residents across Darlington received a £1.6 Million boost from the Benefit Enquiry Action Team (BEAT) during 2024, and 15% increase from 2023. Darlington Borough Council commissions Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland to provide the service. It has helped residents from all wards apply for unclaimed benefits they are entitled to, including

around £309k for pensioners. The 2024 report highlights 20 areas of support provided for benefit maximisation, with the greatest levels of maximisation attributed to Personal Independence Payments, Attendance Allowance, and several benefits associated with Universal Credit. Part of the 2024 success can be attributed to an enhanced campaign that raises awareness of the service and encourages people to seek support. Both the service and campaign will continue throughout 2025/26.

Councillor Jim Garner
Stronger Communities Portfolio