

COUNCIL
15 MAY 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)

2. Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends for Darlington:

Darlington	YTD March 2024	YTD March 2025
Crime	12005	10391
ASB	2246	2620

Crime

3. The year-to-date figure is significantly lower than the same period last year, by 13%. Specific areas of crime with comparative increasing trends are: drugs offences, racially-aggravated crime, rape, burglary (business and community) and possession of weapons. All reported incidents of violence have reduced to varying amounts (16% reduction) and harassment has reduced by 19%.

ASB

4. The ASB year-to-date figure is higher than the same period last year, by 17%. During the reporting period there was an increase in anti-social behaviour associated with a gathering of youths travelling from outside the area into the Town Centre and causing significant incidents of ASB. Additional measures were introduced to address the ASB, including a police-led ASB Dispersal Order, additional uniformed staff on patrol, increased youth intervention work, increased staffing within CCTV room and increased civic enforcement.
5. During the reporting period the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service have received 12 referrals into the Early Intervention and Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team.
6. Between 5 December 2024 and 31 March 2025:
 - (a) 12 young people received first warnings for ASB
 - (b) 13 young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
 - (c) 7 committed ABA breaches
 - (d) 12 young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention

- (e) 7 young people are awaiting interview.
- (f) 1 young person has received a Civil Injunction and another young person's case is being processed.

Parking and Environmental Enforcement Activity

- 7. Since the last reporting period officers have continued to enforce parking contraventions and tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and waste in back lanes, the figures below provide an overview of activity.
 - (a) 142 enviro crime cases (of which 107 closed)
 - (b) 1 Fixed Penalty Notices issued for Breach on a Community Protection Notice (£100)
 - (c) 1 Community Protection Warnings (CPW) issued
 - (d) 1 Community Protection Notices (CPN) issued
 - (e) 2 individuals were prosecuted for obstructing investigations, with one individual ordered to pay £1674. A second individual was fined a total of £458
 - (f) A further Case was adjourned until 2 April 2025 for 3 offences (related to fly tipping)
 - (g) Trail cameras to improve CCTV deployment options are being used
 - (h) 5235 Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) have been issued in the last nine months. During the period of 01/04/23 – 31/03/24 6396 PCNs were issued.

Begging Incidents

- 8. Begging incidents during the first three months of 2025 have shown a significant increase of 74 recorded incidents, compared to the same period the previous year. Dedicated patrols and joined-up partnership working is underway to address this and showing signs of improvement.
- 9. There is currently a cohort of 17 people begging who teams are engaging with to provide all available support mechanisms. Intelligence is gathered amongst partners and reviewed at multi-agency meetings to determine the most appropriate solutions and actions. Support is offered through a dedicated outreach worker who engages and signposts individuals to the appropriate services.
- 10. Media campaigns focussed on begging continue to educate members of the public on ways to report incidents of begging.

Licensing

- 11. Licensing have commenced plans for the introduction of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill currently going through Parliament and anticipated to receive Royal Assent later this year. Whilst Trading Standards will be the enforcement agency, a new licensing regime will need

to be established. This will require co-ordination between regional and national networks and will be a substantial piece of work within tight legislative timescales.

12. Two separate prosecutions are ongoing for illegal dog breeding involving four defendants. These cases have been listed for trial at Peterlee Magistrates Court later this year.

Trading Standards

13. The trading standards team have assisted in multi-agency work alongside Police, Immigration and HMRC in relation to illegal vape and tobacco sellers. Large seizures have been made, and investigations are ongoing. They have also assisted in a number of visits to barber shops to check on legal compliance.
14. The team have also undertaken joint visits with the Licensing team to businesses licensed to sell alcohol. Issues have been discovered and appropriate action taken. Information gathered of interest to other teams within the council such as illegal American sweets has been passed over for investigation.
15. The team routinely undertake a series of programmed inspections to high-risk businesses, and these have been completed for the 2024-25 year. These have included visits to car dealers, vape sellers, farms, and the most complained about businesses. Visits were also undertaken to e-bike suppliers and repairers and advice given on lithium batteries and recharging. With the introduction of new vape legislation coming into force on 1 June 2025 banning disposable vapes, the team have commenced visits to retailers to ensure that they are all aware of the changes.

Plan for Neighbourhoods

16. Darlington was included in the second tranche of Long Term Plan for Towns announced in March 2024. With the incoming Government the programme was paused in July and then in November it was announced that it would be replaced with an initiative with a revised focus as part of a wider regeneration programme.
17. A prospectus for Plan for Neighbourhoods was published on 5 March 2025 outlining the new approach and confirming that Darlington is one of the 75 eligible authorities.
18. £20 million will be provided to Darlington over the next 10 years.
19. The intention of the programme is to bring communities together, allocating funding to improve living standards and give people in the 75 recipient locations more of a stake in their future.

Neighbourhood Boards

20. The government will support the establishment of new Neighbourhood Boards, for local people to address deprivation and regenerate their local area.

21. Each board is required, in partnership with their local authority, to develop a 'Regeneration Plan', setting out its vision for the next decade alongside a more detailed 'Investment Plan' for the first four years of the programme.
22. The Government recognises that there are existing 'Town Boards' and governance structures already in place to deliver the previous administration's Long-Term Plan for Towns programme. It is expected that these Board will form the basis of the new Boards.
23. Neighbourhood Boards are required to confirm finalised membership and any proposals to alter their place boundaries by 22 April 2025.
24. The existing Towns Board met on 1 April, where it was agreed that the existing membership would be proposed for the Neighbourhood Board.
25. The Board also discussed how community engagement and capacity building could be undertaken. The chair of the Board will meet with the Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group in May.

Household Support Fund

26. Household Support Fund (HSF) will be extended from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. As has been done for previous schemes, the fund will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. This will be the fifth extension to the fund since its inception in October 2021.
27. Authorities are required to send a delivery plan to DWP by 30 May 2025 which outlines their intentions for The Fund, clearly setting out their priorities and approach for use of the Fund, and to demonstrate the ways in which they intend to allocate their funding.
28. The objective of The Fund is the same as the previous extension in that it is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
29. The last rounds of the Fund covered a six-month period however this round covers a full year. Allocations have been published with Darlington's being £1,610,640.10.
30. In Darlington, the fund is delivered by third party organisation with a significant proportion being administered by Darlington based voluntary sector organisations.
31. Previous rounds of Household Support Fund have been successfully delivered, reaching a wide range of households requiring support and achieving both planned outputs and spend.
32. Therefore, this programme builds on that delivered in previous rounds and includes:
 - (a) Food Vouchers over holidays for children eligible for free school meals

- (b) Support for Care Leavers
- (c) Vulnerable families supported by Voluntary Sector (targeted using the Low Income Family Tracker):
 - i. Support for Elderly - support will be targeted at those pensioners whose annual income is low enough for them to be in receipt of some form of support from the Council or DWP as a consequence of their low income recorded on the LIFT dashboard but not in receipt of Pension Credit.
 - ii. Lone Parent Households with children living in poverty.
- (d) Support for Elderly with energy bills – a targeted programme delivered by Age UK to improve the energy efficiency of homes by installing energy saving devices.
- (e) Support for Food Banks - there are ten foodbanks across Darlington. The largest is at King Centre on Whessoe Road. All food banks are seeing an increase in demand. Whilst there are numerous reasons why people use food banks the increase in fuel costs is cited frequently as is reducing monthly budgets. There is an increase in demand from working families but also a growth in demand from the elderly.
- (f) Uniform Exchange Scheme - the scheme, established during the pandemic, has grown in use and is well supported by uniform donations. It reduces a significant cost burden parents experience in sending children to school.
- (g) Crisis Support Grant - discretionary support will be provided to low income households living in Darlington who are in financial hardship and struggling to manage their essential expenditure. Delivered by Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB), the support will be focussed on households who are being acutely affected by the Cost of Living Crisis and who may be in significant debt.
- (h) Preventative Support - guidance for this round of HSF explains that the fund may be used to prevent poverty locally and build local resilience. This can include activity which prevents vulnerable residents from falling into - or falling further into – crisis. Citizens Advice Bureau will provide:
 - i. Fuel Efficiency Advice/Support
 - ii. Financial and Income Maximisation Service

Councillor Jim Garner
Stronger Communities Portfolio