

COUNCIL
17 JULY 2025

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

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

Public Health

2. The recent swap to stop events in the town centre have proved to be extremely popular with a total of 244 people spoken to and 241 reusable vapes given out to our residents to aid their quit attempt. With the ban on single-use vapes coming into force on 1 June 2025, reusable UK regulated vapes have been more popular and the Service has not experienced an increase in people returning to smoking.
3. On 2 June an application was submitted for a Sport England place-based development funding allocation. Place based work is about whole system change, bringing partners together to normalise physical activity as part of everyday life. The focus of the funding is not specifically about sport or sports facilities, but 'inactivity, activity, accessibility, health, and lifestyle'. The application has been submitted by Tees Valley Sport, in partnership with the Public Health and Move More teams. There are strong relationships established with our VCS organisations to strengthen the system and optimise the opportunity. The application is for funding to deliver a programme of development work over a 15-month time period. This will include gathering insights across three defined geographical areas, those being Red Hall and Albert Hill, Park East and Central Darlington and Pierremont. The geographical areas have been chosen based on a combination of levels of deprivation, child poverty data, proportion of children who are overweight (at reception and year 6) and the availability of community assets. Insight will also be collected for the following themed workstreams; learning disabilities, active environments and young people (aged 13- 18 years). If the application is successful work will commence from September 2025.
4. There has been fantastic progress with the ongoing work we are carrying out in relation to our oral health promotion campaign. Currently 13 schools and 9 nurseries are delivering the Supervised Toothbrushing Scheme. An additional 5 primary schools have agreed to deliver from September, meaning it will be offered across 64 per cent of primary schools. Furthermore, 8 of the primary schools have agreed to extend the programme across all of their early years and KS1 classes. The programme will also be piloted with 5 childminder provisions.
5. Efforts will continue to encourage more schools to participate in the Supervised Toothbrushing Scheme, including meeting with schools, sharing local data and highlighting how the offer aligns with the Early Years Foundation Framework.
6. Oral health promotional events have been delivered, including Tractor Tuesday and Eco Fayre pop up stalls. We distributed 232 Toothbrush and toothpaste packs, 253 toothbrush timers and over 200 reward charts to parents and carers. There will be a presence at

future events, including Darlington by the Sea. The 0-19 team are issuing free flow cups as part of routine visits for toddlers and toothbrush and toothpaste packs to families who need them.

7. As mentioned previously Darlington has received some national funding to support the delivery and expansion of Supervised Toothbrushing Schemes, with a specific ask to focus on early years settings in the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Darlington. The lead for oral health promotion has attended the Nursery Network and Primary Heads meetings to encourage increased uptake of the Supervised Toothbrushing Scheme. The funding is also being used to support the development of 2 educational videos to promote key oral health messages and tips.
8. A task and finish group has been established to understand issues and barriers in relation to oral health promotion to support the implementation and extension of toothbrushing to all Key Stage 1 pupils and identify other oral health promotion opportunities to consider. Eleven schools have been invited to this group.
9. The Oral Health Promotion Alliance launched on 5 June with 14 partners invited to attend including the 0-19 service, Education Team, Social Care, Oral Health Team and a local dentist. The Alliance will support the development and monitoring of a new Oral Health Promotion Strategy. The initial meeting was very successful, and the draft strategy will be developed by the end of July. Consultation has taken place with groups across the town on oral health and a survey carried out to inform the strategy development, the results are currently being analysed.

Housing Services

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

10. Following the results of the first Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey, which was completed in November 2023, our Tenants Panel asked us to focus on three specific areas to improve tenant satisfaction, these were:
 - (a) Complaints handling;
 - (b) Listening to tenants' views;
 - (c) Dealing with anti-social behaviour.
11. Within these areas, the Tenants Panel also suggested some actions, which they felt would improve satisfaction for all tenants. These included:
 - (a) Setting up a dedicated housing complaints webpage;
 - (b) Increasing the visibility of the Tenants Panel;
 - (c) Setting up transactional feedback surveys for complaint and anti-social behaviour investigations.
12. All these actions were completed in 2024-25, and whilst there have been overall improvements in the 2024 Tenant Satisfaction survey, there are still improvements that

can be made. Our plan for action in 2025-26 will include:

- (a) **Repairs:** Our repairs service shows the highest level of satisfaction but also included some the highest areas of dissatisfaction. Therefore, our Tenants Panel will be carrying out a review of the repairs service this summer, starting with the void property repair process. Those aged 65+ were more satisfied than younger tenants, so we will be looking at how to engage more with younger tenants and those with families.
- (b) **Complaints handling:** The Tenants Panel suggested that we; use the Tenants Panel as a tool to review our complaints and provide independent feedback, invite a member of the housing complaints team to the Tenants Panel every quarter to go through complaints and focus on the improvements made on the back of this, and continue to improve feedback with transactional surveys, which tenants can complete at the end of an investigation. From this, we will check if we adhered to the policy and whether our internal processes are robust and fit for purpose. The Tenants Panel have been attending scrutiny training, so they can scrutinise our performance better.
- (c) **Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour:** The Tenants Panel suggested that we; include an article in Housing Connect about what actions we have taken, how tenants can report issues to us and ensure this is a regular feature, produce a new leaflet detailing how to report anti-social behaviour to help explain the process better, and review the current webpages to ensure they provide all the information that our tenants need.
- (d) **Listening to tenant's views:** The Tenants Panel suggested that we; recruit a Tenants Panel member from each area of Darlington to ensure no area is being overlooked, aim to recruit a community champion for each area of Darlington to take part in estate walkabouts and train tenants as fire marshals for the area that they live in, and create a new Tenants Panel recruitment leaflet that outlines the roles and responsibilities of being a Tenants Panel and Digital Tenants Panel Member.

New Build

- 13. Members will be aware of the criminal damage inflicted on a number of our much-needed new build properties at the Neasham Road site, and I am devastated by this act of vandalism. Six of these homes will need to be demolished and rebuilt. There will be significant costs, which we are talking to our insurers about. The destruction also means there will be a delay in completing this phase of the building work, resulting in potential tenants having to wait longer for their new homes.
- 14. However, despite this set-back, the Neasham Road site is still on course to be mostly completed by March 2026, as planned, with the damaged properties being completed by mid-2026. I must commend and thank our fantastic Building Services team for responding so quickly and professionally to this incident. Now that the investigation has come to a close, we will be undertaking an internal review.

Thrive Darlington Service

- 15. Members will recall from my report in May 2024 that the Council, in partnership with WayThrough Charity, was successful in bidding for £770,000 from the Government's Single

Homeless Accommodation Programme. The project, called Thrive Darlington, has used part of the funding to purchase 12 units of accommodation, five of which are occupied and seven are undergoing refurbishment.

16. 11 young people have been accepted into the project with mental health, lack of independent living skills and homelessness being the predominant reason for referral. Support is being provided by WayThrough, including income maximisation, debt advice, access to training and education, access to leisure and faith activities, physical and mental health management, and securing and maintaining move-on accommodation from the project.
17. Examples of the work undertaken so far with the young people accepted onto the project include:
 - (a) One young person volunteered at the library, which enabled them to gain new skills around organisation and having a structured approach.
 - (b) One young person volunteered at a foodbank which gave the young people a good understanding of community challenges and being a part of improving the lives of those struggling with the financial crisis. This also helped improve their own financial understanding.
 - (c) Two young people volunteered at the King's Church. This involved the young person supporting the team in the kitchen with meeting and greeting customers, washing-up and serving customers. This empowered the young people to manage their own time, organise their daily routines and, as an incentive, meals were provided.
 - (d) One young person volunteered at Eastbourne Community Centre at a table-top sale event.
 - (e) Gym sessions and gardening groups were set up and led by the project, which focused on improving young people's physical and mental health. The sessions also support young people to socialise and integrate with others in the community and improve their confidence.
 - (f) Participation in youth networks. The team attended regular Youth Network meetings, where they obtained relevant contacts from local agencies working with young people. This was focused on volunteering, training and education. It also provided useful resources for young people such as mental health services.

Dolphin Centre

18. Work continues to install 399 photovoltaic (PV) panels on the flat roofs of the Dolphin Centre and is expected to complete late summer/early autumn.
19. A new seating area has been installed outside the changing village in reception to encourage customers to go bare foot when entering the pool complex to reduce the use of overshoes and support the environment. Biodegradable overshoes have also been purchased for those not wishing to go barefoot.

20. May half term holidays were extremely busy with an increase in footfall and income in most business areas. Swimming in particular experienced a large increase on the same period last year. A new pool party was introduced and attracted families and young people in the town taking the pool to full capacity.
21. A water safety roadshow is being delivered in primary schools across the town. The talk is being delivered by a member of the swim teaching team who was involved in a near drowning incident as a child and therefore can share real life experience and dangers associated with water.

Eastbourne Sports Complex

SEND Basketball

22. Darlington Move More Team has supported Darlington Storm Basketball club with a successful Sport England Movement Fund application for £14,500 to provide a specific SEND basketball session alongside the club that will be fully inclusive and sustainable for SEND participants. The application also offers young aspiring coaches the chance to become qualified and support the club in developing a SEND Basketball team.

Inclusion Programme

23. Darlington Move More Team have been working with Sport for Confidence and Teesside University on developing a new Boccia session at the Dolphin Centre following a successful application of £12,000 to the Sport England movement fund. The bid includes new inclusive boccia equipment, line marking of the main sports hall, funding for the session and leaders to be trained up from internal and external inclusive services and occupational therapists. The session has grown significantly with 26 attendances on average from various partner organisations since the start of April.

Councillor Matthew Roche
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing