

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY
28 AUGUST 2025

PUBLIC SAFETY OVERVIEW REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The report provides members with an overview of the ways in which the Council and its partners supports public safety across the Borough. The report focusses on the areas of Public Safety that members wished to receive more information on, particularly from a community safety perspective; namely the nighttime economy, events and partnership working.
2. The report does not cover other areas where the Council plays a significant role in protecting public safety such as adults and children's services, planning, highways, road safety and bridges, arboriculture, environmental health and building control.

Summary

3. Darlington Borough Council seeks to support Public Safety through a number of internal mechanisms and measures which are outlined in the report. In addition to this, the Council works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that public safety across the borough is protected.
4. The Council is part of the Darlington Community Safety Partnership with a range of other partners including Durham Constabulary, Durham Fire and Rescue Service, the Police and Crime Commissioner, NHS, and the Probation Service. These agencies all work together to tackle crime and disorder, as well as voluntary and community groups, to collectively implement and deliver initiatives that help Darlington to be a safe place to live, work and visit.
5. The Council is also part of the North East Local Resilience Forum (LRF). Local Resilience Forums (LRF's) are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. The geographical area the LRF's cover is based on police areas. The LRF's plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies. They work to identify potential risks and produce emergency plans to either prevent or mitigate the impact of any incident on their local communities. Darlington work in partnership with Durham on a shared Civil contingency service.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Members note the content of the report.

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Background Papers

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Council Plan	The work undertaken by various Council teams and partners helps to support communities to remain safe and resilient and addresses anti-social behaviour and crime issues in the community.
Addressing inequalities	Taking steps to protect public safety ensures that all residents can be safe and feel safe in their communities.
Tackling Climate Change	There is no impact as a result of this report.
Efficient and effective use of resources	There is no impact on the Council's efficiency agenda.
Health and Wellbeing	Taking steps to protect and maintain public safety ensures that residents can enjoy and feel safe in their communities.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The report outlines how the Council works with partners to make a difference in relation to crime and disorder
Wards Affected	All Wards
Groups Affected	The work undertaken by the Council and its partners has a direct impact on residents and visitors to the Borough and their experience of living in, working in or visiting Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact as a result of this report.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

7. The report focuses on specific aspects of community safety; namely the nighttime economy, events and partnership working. The report outlines areas of partnership working at regional level, borough level and team level that contribute to community safety.

Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

8. At a regional level the LRF is in place to help manage any Multi-agency response to a major emergency or incident. The LRF is a multi-agency partnership made up of representatives from agencies. These include the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and supported by other organisations.

9. LRFs also work with other partners in the military and voluntary agencies who provide a valuable contribution emergency preparedness and response.
10. The LRF has developed a suite of plans to help manage scenarios that may materialise. A couple of examples are the Darlington Town Centre Evacuation Plan and the Multi-agency Flood Response Plan. To support the work of the LRF and respond to civil contingencies, Darlington work in partnership with Durham on a shared Civil contingency service.
11. In response well tested and exercise structures are in place following the key principles for emergency response. Strategic, Tactical and Operational groups can be established to respond to any incident and set out their main objectives for the response and deploy assets and resources accordingly. This process is reviewed continually.

Community Safety Partnership.

12. At a borough level, Darlington Community Safety partnership brings together a range of partners including the Council, Police, Health, Probation, Police and Crime Commissioner, charitable and voluntary organisations and fire and rescue services to help make Darlington a safe place in which to live and work.
13. A key requirement of the partnership is to produce a Community Safety Plan which sets out key crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour risks to our local communities and priorities moving forward. The current Plan is for 2021-2026 and the Partnership is currently reviewing the production of a plan for 2026 onwards.
14. The current priorities under the 2021-2026 plan are:
 - (a) Protecting and supporting people, especially those most at risk.
 - (b) Promoting safer places to create a safe, secure and vibrant town.
 - (c) Tackling violent crime, including domestic abuse.
 - (d) Building strong and cohesive communities.

Public Event Safety Advisory Group (PESAG)

15. Another Multi-agency partnership is PESAG; this has been set up to provide advice and guidance to organisers of public events in the Darlington area. The core members of the group are senior officers from all the emergency services working in the borough of Darlington (Police, Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service, NHS Trust) and Council services (highways, building control, environmental health, community safety and licensing).
16. PESAG's main objectives are:
 - to encourage high levels of safety and welfare at events by giving advice
 - to encourage good practice in safety and welfare planning for events
 - to ensure events cause minimal adverse effects

All comments and observation made by PESAG are always advisory. It has no statutory compulsion, and organisers are under no obligation to submit information, attend PESAG

meetings, or follow PESAG's advice. However, each of the constituent members have their own regulatory role and may exercise their powers independently.

17. Events are managed on an individual basis and Police staffing levels are managed by assessing each individual event looking at the Darlington Public Event Safety Advisory Group (PESAG) submitted paperwork and discussing the events between partners.
18. If information is received regarding events such as protests, the Police engage with the groups and ensure that protests are managed effectively and lawfully.
19. The Police and Community Safety team also look at any intelligence that is received and from this ensure that the correct response is given to incidents in terms of the style of policing and number of officers/staff required.

Council Teams

20. The report focuses on specific aspects of community safety; namely the nighttime economy, events and partnership working. This section does not cover all of the work by the Council but provides an overview of some of the teams' contributions to the nighttime economy, events and partnership working.

Community Safety and Civic Enforcement

21. The Community Safety Department work with other areas of the Council, the Police and other partners to ensure the safety of all in Darlington. There are various teams and groups involved in seeking to protect and improve public safety.
22. The Community Safety Department investigate improving the life of all in Darlington and deliver projects such as the introduction of "Number Forty" and have sought to improve resilience through measures such as the increase of defibrillators, bleed kits and naloxone across Darlington.
23. The Begging in Darlington Group is a multi-agency group which meets every six weeks to discuss those people begging in Darlington. The partners look to support individuals through the 4 E's process to address their behaviours: through Empathy, Engagement, Education and Enforcement. The aim of the group is to understand an individual's situation and support them away from begging with enforcement as a last resort.
24. The Rough Sleeper Action Group meets every month to discuss those who are rough sleeping and seeks ways to support them into finding accommodation.
25. The Community Safety Department hold a weekly meeting to discuss threat and risk from the previous week and highlight any actionable information to minimise risk. They also work closely with the Senior Leadership of Darlington Police and meet monthly to discuss any threat and risk and appropriate actions to mitigate any risks identified.
26. The Civic Enforcement Officers deal with anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, dog control, stray dogs and parking patrols. Teams undertake both pro-active and reactive work to

address issues across communities. The team use various powers to educate and take action where applicable to ensure that public safety is maintained.

27. Among the powers used by the team are Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO's). The new Town Centre PSPO came into effect on 1st July 2025. The Town Centre PSPO extended the area of coverage to cover the train station and covers the drinking of alcohol in public spaces, feeding of the birds or pigeons and anti-social use of a skateboards, scooters, skates, bicycles, e-bikes or e-scooters and threatening behaviour. The Boroughwide PSPO also came into effect on 1st July 2025 and this covers begging, household waste and allowing a dog to stray.
28. If any emerging issues or trends start to arise in Darlington, as a Community Safety Partnership, we introduce a Time Limited Project (TLP) where the group would form a working group looking at resolutions to the issues. An example of this is a group that was set up at the beginning of the year to address an increase in anti-social behaviour within the town centre.
29. During the calendar year, several joint operations are conducted in response to annual events or emerging issues. An example of this is the current "Safer Streets Summer Initiative" where joint patrols are being undertaken by the Civic Enforcement Team and Police to address anti-social behaviour during the school holiday period.
30. The Police work with the Council to identify issues through the gathering and analysing of intelligence and we work in partnership with the Police to address any such issue using powers or identifying issues that require operational orders and/or an increase in staffing levels.
31. The Council also chairs a Water Safety Group which meets during the year to discuss open water safety. The group has trained officers in line with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) who complete risk assessments on an annual basis to ensure we have appropriate measures in place to protect and prevent open water incidents within Darlington.

Nighttime economy

32. For the past few years Darlington has been flagged as a great night out. Following a thorough assessment process, the town was awarded the Purple Flag award in recognition of its safe, and diverse night-time economy. Purple Flag is an accreditation process (similar to the Green Flag award for parks) and is independently assessed where town and city centres must meet or surpass the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night time economy (ENTE). Numerous Council services contribute to the assessment to ensure a cross-cutting approach to safety in the night-time economy.
33. A number of measures have been taken to improve the night-time economy in Darlington particularly on safety. The improvement of lighting at key identified locations in Darlington town centre was completed in 2022.
34. Number Forty was opened on 1st September 2022 funded by the Violence Against Women and Girls Initiative (VAWG). The building offers a safe space for everyone within the town centre on a Friday and Saturday evening between the hours of 9pm and 2am.

35. The Council delivered Personal Safety Training to over 100 females as part of the VAWG agenda and SIA door staff and bar staff across Darlington town centre licensed premises were also trained on identifying signs of VAWG.
36. Taxi Marshall are in place to prevent disorder in taxi queues in the town centre. The Marshalls operate on a Friday and Saturday evening, and this position is continually reviewed.
37. A weekly Licensing meeting takes place involving Licensing, CCTV, Police, Community Safety and others to discuss emerging trends and issues within the last week in the licensing trade across Darlington.
38. Partners across Darlington work together to improve the nighttime economy with operations involving dogs trained to detect drugs and licensing visits throughout the year.

CCTV

39. Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) is part of everyday life within Darlington, and we have coverage across the borough from the CCTV control room. There are over 240 cameras across the borough.
40. The CCTV control room, Council, Police and partners work effectively in this area and there are many examples of where offences have been prevented or detected as a direct result of the partnership. The CCTV effectively monitors all areas of Darlington including the nighttime economy and offences such as burglary, drug taking, public disorder and drink driving have been detected or prevented.
41. There is a quantity of deployable cameras which can be utilised in locations where there are problems such as anti-social behaviour or the use of off-road motorcycles. Deployment is dependent on meeting the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA).
42. Lifeline response officers are on hand 24 hours a day to support the elderly or those who suffer disabilities to live independently. It gives the security of knowing there is support whenever it is needed.

Licensing

43. The Licensing team are actively engaged in the local Pubwatch scheme, which includes the sharing of information and empowering premises to make collective decisions to ban problematic individuals from using their premises, with a 'banned from one, banned from all' approach.
44. Problem premises are continually monitored, and responsible authorities such as Licensing, Police, and Environmental Health will work with their management in an attempt to resolve issues. Where these cannot be resolved and significant failings continue, a full review of their licence by the Licensing Committee will be initiated through a formal process administered by Licensing.

45. Taxis are integral to the safe and effective dispersal of people enjoying or working within the nighttime economy. Licensing works closely with the trade to ensure safety standards are maintained and acts promptly where issues arise. They have delegated powers to suspend drivers where there is any doubt about their fitness for the role, and refer them to the Licensing Committee, who can revoke their licence.
46. Pavement cafes can increase the appeal and vibrancy of the town, particularly within daytime and evening economies. They do, however, present challenges in relation to road safety and potential deliberate attacks. Full Council has recently approved a robust policy that is both sympathetic to business needs, whilst maintaining a high degree of public safety.

Trading Standards

47. The Trading Standards team protects public safety by enforcing consumer rights around unfair trading practices and product safety. The team routinely visit traders and offer advice on the sale of safe goods and ensuring that underage sales legislation is enforced in relation to alcohol in off-licence premises and many other age restricted products such as solvents, vapes, cigarettes and knives. The team have a pro-active approach to enforcing legislation protecting consumers from unsafe and often counterfeit products particularly illegal vapes and tobacco products.
48. Organised crime is a major concern for public safety and the trading standards team work together with other agencies such as the National Crime Agency, Regional Police Teams, Local Police, HMRC, Immigration to tackle organised criminality and money laundering activities. The team routinely meet other agencies to look at opportunities to disrupt organised criminality. The team are highly pro-active in tackling this area of criminality which has a huge effect on legitimate traders and public safety.

Risk Management

49. Through all the above partnerships, meetings and processes, risks are managed on a regular basis through the groups formed. If any identified risks are raised these are managed through the partnership groups and extra ordinary meetings are held to effectively reduce the risks identified or ensure that measures are taken to effectively manage the risks.