

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 2025

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main updates under the Stronger Communities Portfolio are as follows: -

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Trends for all Darlington

Darlington	YTD July 2024	YTD July 2025
Crime	3706	3596
ASB	935	1225

Crime

2. The year-to-date figure (to July 2025) is lower than the same period last year, by 3%. Aspects of crime showing increasing trends are arson, robbery, sexual offences and racially motivated offences whereas there have been significant reductions in the incidence of theft, burglary and vehicle offences. These reduced by varying amounts (19.5%, 17.4% and 32.1% reduction respectively) and shoplifting also reduced by 17.2%.

ASB

3. ASB year-to-date figure (to July 2025) is higher than the same period last year by 31%. During the reporting period there was an increase in anti-social behaviour over the period associated with youths, off-road bikes and ASB nuisance and damage in parks and play areas. Additional patrols are being undertaken and new signage is being erected for hotspot areas.
4. Areas of increased ASB reports are Sadberge and Whessoe, Cockerton East, Middleton St George, Lascelles, College, Mowden, Hurworth, and Haughton.
5. The town centre ASB has decreased by 3% year to date.
6. The Civic Enforcement Team continue to work with the Police and the Young People’s Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention. Over the school holidays there has been an increase in ASB, particularly within play parks across Darlington. Both Civic Enforcement and Police have increased patrols across these highlighted areas. Civic Enforcement consider where appropriate deployable CCTV cameras at locations of high ASB. Following the schools re-opening, the Civic Enforcement Team are engaging with the schools to identify eight young people across Darlington who have been responsible for ASB over the holidays where partners have been unable to identify them. Once these offenders

have been identified appropriate action will be taken.

7. We are working on taking cases to court where a young male has breached his civil injunction and Civic Enforcement have also obtained an interim injunction on another young male who has been causing ASB in the town centre.
8. During the reporting period the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service have received six referrals into the Early Intervention and Prevention Pathway from the Civic Enforcement Team.
9. Between 1 June 2025 and 14 August 2025.
 - (a) Six young people received first warnings for ASB
 - (b) Eight young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA)
 - (c) Five young people committed ABA breaches
 - (d) Six young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young People's Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention
 - (e) Seven young people are awaiting interview
 - (f) One young person has received a Civil Injunction, a further file for one young person is sat with Legal, pending a court date.
 - (g) The ASB prevention officer attended four Primary Schools to discuss with students in Years 3-6, the issues surrounding Anti-Social behaviour.

Environmental Crime

10. 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 from 1 June 2025 – 14 August 2025:
 - (a) 91 environmental crime cases have been investigated. 66 of these cases are closed and the remaining are still under investigation.
 - (b) Five Fixed Penalty Notices have been served. Two for Fly Tipping each £1,000 and two x £100 for drinking in a public place (PSPO) and one x £100 fine for Begging inside the PSPO area.
 - (c) Four Warnings were issued under the new PSPO Procedure in relation to side waste.
 - (d) One Case in relation to side waste was withdrawn as the Defendant moved away with no forwarding address
 - (e) Two individuals were prosecuted for obstructing investigations into the containment of waste and fly tipping - both were ordered to pay £1,074.

Trail cameras to improve CCTV deployment options are being used where the acceptance criteria are met.

11. The Council have recently become a member of the national fly-tipping prevention group (NFTPG). This is a group chaired by Defra and includes representatives from central and local government, enforcement authorities, the waste industry and the police and fire service and aims to reduce fly-tipping through closer working and the sharing of best practice.

Begging Incidents

12. Begging incidents in the last four months (April-July 2025) show a significant decrease, with 58 recorded incidents. There have been dedicated patrols and joined-up partnership working.
13. There is currently a cohort of around 20 people begging mostly inactive due to the strategic approach. We are engaging through all available support mechanisms and offer various support through our dedicated 'out-reach worker' who engages and signpost them to the right service required.
14. We continue to carryout media campaigns on begging and educate the members of the public on ways to report incidents of begging. This is in-line with the multi-agency strategic approach through the four action pathways, empathy, engagement, education and enforcement.

Plan for Neighbourhoods

15. The Neighbourhood Board has been established and has met twice. The membership of the Board is as agreed for the earlier iteration of the programme, Long Term Plan for Towns: The Towns Board with addition representatives of the community and voluntary sectors.
16. The membership was submitted to MHCLG by 22 April and approved along with the proposed boundary which was revised to include South Park.
17. There have been two meetings of the Neighbourhood Board to date. At the meeting of May 13, the Board:
 - (a) Agreed Board membership and structure
 - (b) Agreed a revised geographic boundary including South Park
 - (c) Agreed to commission the voluntary and community sector to undertake community engagement
 - (d) Agreed to establish a Towns Fund subgroup to provide oversight of the Towns Fund initiative, reporting back to the main Board. Key areas of work would similarly be overseen by subgroups reporting back to the Board
 - (e) Agreed to establish links with existing relevant groups through members in common

18. At this meeting the board also considered data which would help identify areas of the town that are 'left behind
19. At the meeting of 24 June (minutes to be agreed) the Board, signed off the strategic vision as:

"To foster connected, inclusive, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods across Darlington that celebrate local identity, support community wellbeing, and can adapt to the evolving needs of residents—ensuring every neighbourhood is a great place to live, work, and thrive."

(a) Confirmed the Thematic Areas as,

- i. Driving Growth (Economic inclusion, town centre)
- ii. Thriving neighbourhoods (targeting 'left behind')

(b) Considered areas that would act as a locus for activity.

(c) It also concluded that Communities not defined by geographic boundaries, particularly people with disabilities, should be considered within the programme.

(d) The Board agreed to commission a Feasibility study of developing a STEM Centre on Central Park. The cost to be circulated to the Board.

(e) The Voluntary and Community sector have been commissioned to undertake community engagement over the summer. This will involve engagement in the town centre via the events team programme and also neighbourhoods through a series of community events. There will be interim feedback at September's Neighbourhood Board meeting and a full report for the October meeting.

Trading Standards

20. The team have given advice to a new trader, who is a home manufacturer of soft toys, on compliance with product safety legislation. A number of unsafe, counterfeit labubu dolls have been removed from stores and advice offered to the retailers on product safety legislation.
21. Financial Investigation work in conjunction with Durham Police has been undertaken in relation to illegal goods sellers in order to help build intelligence to tackle this area of criminality.
22. Work is ongoing to tackle a number of business premises who repeatedly supply illegal cigarettes. Several test purchases have taken place to identify these illegal sellers which have then been visited and illegal stock seized. These visits were principally undertaken during a day of action which included neighbourhood police and a tobacco dog detection company. Several large seizures were made, and action will be taken on these illegal suppliers.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

23. Since April 2025, the Private Sector Housing team have received nine applications for the Mandatory HMO Licensing scheme. There are currently 44 licensed properties capable of housing 156 people in Darlington. Around 20% of all properties in Darlington are privately rented, of which HMOs make up a small but valuable section of the sector. HMOs are typically occupied by single people who may have moved to the area to work or who those who are looking for affordable self-contained accommodation.

Renters' Rights Bill

24. The Private Sector Housing Team have continued to work with other Local Authorities in the Northeast in the introduction of the Renters Rights Bill. The Bill is expected to be enacted in the Autumn with Tenancy Reform, such as creating a new possession system which will end no fault evictions (section 21 notices), being implemented next Spring followed by other sections of the act such as the creation of a Landlords Portal (registration scheme) and new Decent Homes Standard for private tenancies being introduced at a later date.

Warm Homes Local Grant

25. 70 expressions of interest for the Warm Homes Local Grant fund to improve energy efficiency in owner occupied homes have been received from the Government for homes across the Tees Valley. It is expected that up to 150 properties will be improved this financial year.

Licensing

26. Darlington's taxi policy public consultation has now ended, and responses are being compiled for the Licensing Committee to consider. The Licensing Committee will then make recommendations to Full Council on a proposed new policy.
27. Licensing is about to commence a public consultation on Darlington's Street Trading Policy. Since it was last reviewed in 2025, there have been changes to the town centre and a decline in the number of traders using the current authorised locations.
28. Home Office Immigration Enforcement has submitted a Premises Licence Review application for The Oak Tree Public House, Middleton St George, following a visit where four people were found to be working illegally. The licence holders are Punch Taverns Plc, and a full public hearing was held by the Licensing Committee. The Home Office asked for a revocation of the licence as this seriously undermines the crime and disorder objective of the Licensing Act. Prior to the hearing, Punch Taverns (premises Licence Holder) removed the leaseholder responsible for the illegal worker offences. They had been unaware, and this was in direct breach of a tenancy agreement. The Home Office was happy that the Premises Licence Holder had acted promptly and responsibly, and conditions were agreed to prevent this from occurring in the future. These conditions were added to the premises licence by the Licensing Committee at last week's hearing