

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Stronger Communities Portfolio.

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

2. The Police are migrating their crime and ASB reporting records to a new system. This has coincided with a new analyst starting at Darlington Borough Council who is currently being trained on the new access and going through the access approval process. An update on statistics will be provided at a future meeting.

Crime

3. Reports from the Police are that crime this year is on course for a slight decrease compared to last year at this time.

ASB

4. The latest date available shows an increase in ASB compared to the previous year. However, reports from police suggest it is falling but still above last year's trends. Increases in ASB are seen across the Durham Police area and in many other areas across the Country.
5. Work continues to address ASB and between 16 December 2025 up to and including 11 February 2026.
 - (a) Ten young people received first warnings for ASB in the Cockerton and Town Centres areas for low level ASB.
 - (b) Five young people received acceptable behaviour agreements (ABA). Ten young people committed ABA breaches.
 - (c) Nine young people were referred to Darlington Borough Council Young People's Engagement and Justice Service for positive intervention.
 - (d) Six young people are awaiting interview.
 - (e) Two youths still subject to a Civil Injunction.
 - (f) The ASB prevention officer has carried out one ASB session with a school (years 5 & 6). And one ASB & Fire Awareness joint session with a school (years 5 & 6), alongside Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

Environmental Crime

6. Work continues to address environmental crime and between 16 December 2025 up to and including 11 February 2026.
 - (a) Three Fixed Penalty Notices were issued: 2 x £100 Breach of PSPO for drinking in a public place, 1 x £100 Breach of PSPO for Begging.
 - (b) Three prosecutions for S110 offences for environmental waste/ Fly tipping, totalling £1,644 (this covers fines, costs and victim surcharge. 1 further case for summons to court for S110 offence – scheduled court date is 25 February 2026 (a Section 110 offence is failure or refusal to provide information reasonably required by a registered officer for waste offences).
 - (c) 4 Community Protection Warnings issued
 - (d) 2 Community Protection Notices issued
 - (e) 1 PSPO Warning issued in relation to Household Waste presentation.
 - (f) Section 46 Notices were delivered to 8 Address's within Darlington (a section 46 notice is a legal notice issued under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.) They are issued to residents who fail to comply with the wheeled bin and recycling scheme. The notice also contains information regarding the consequences of non-compliance.

Begging Incidents

7. Begging incidents over the last three months (Nov– Jan 2026) continues to show a decrease compared to same period last year. There has been dedicated patrols, street walks, and joined-up partnership working.
8. There is currently a cohort of around 20 people begging mostly inactive due to the strategic approach. There are a small number of persons who continue to be the focus of attention for partners. We offer various support through our dedicated 'out-reach worker' who engages and signpost them to the right service required.
9. We continue to carryout media campaigns on begging and educate the members of the public on ways to report incidents of begging. The most recent media campaigns was a walk about video on how we engage during the regular multi-agency street support walk. This is in-line with the multi-agency strategic approach through the 4 action pathways, empathy, engagement, education, and enforcement.

Community Safety Partnership

10. Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is currently in the process of reviewing the new CSP plan which will be a 3-year plan that will focus on the priorities arising from evidence and consultation with residents and businesses.

Trading Standards

11. An animal welfare breach was notified to us and has been investigated. A letter of warning has been issued following an advice visit. Visits and liaison with Civic Enforcement with regard to horses causing concern over security.
12. Three premises have been closed until 16 March 2026 by Peterlee Magistrates Court following reports of illegal sales and anti-social behaviour from these three stores. These are being reviewed and landlords consulted in order to determine whether an extension application to the Courts would be appropriate. Further closure applications are listed with the Court.
13. The team will continue to participate in Operation Cece and Joseph, which look at targeting suppliers of illegal cigarettes and vapes with a particular focus on any suspected selling to children. Underage sales test purchasing is planned in relation to a variety of age restricted products to check on compliance. Test purchasers have now been secured, and arrangements are being made for the first round of test purchases in February. All traders who supply age restricted products have received an advice letter and been advised that we will be undertaking test purchasing. The test purchasing activity is scheduled.
14. A number of toys have been purchased and will be submitted for safety compliance. Liaison with the test house is taking place as to appropriate tests.

Private Sector Housing

Renters Rights Act 2025

15. The Private Sector Housing Team is currently working with colleagues across the Council to assist in the implementation of phase 1 the Renters Rights Act 2025. A wide range of changes are due to be introduced for the private rented sector (PRS) on 1 May 2026 initially concentrating on tenancy reform. Later changes significantly change the way in which the Private Sector Housing currently operates following, the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies; the rollout of the PRS Database and PRS Landlord Ombudsman; and changes to the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards and the introduction of a Decent Homes Standard in the PRS (expected in 2035).

Energy Company Obligation scheme

16. The Energy Company Obligation scheme has been cancelled and will not be renewed. ECO4 however has been extended from the original end date of 31 March 2026 to 31 December 2026 following the publication of the government's Warm Homes Plan. 98 ECOflex applications have been processed by Darlington Borough Council since the private sector housing team resumed accepting applications in October 2025, these have mainly been for new gas boilers, loft insulation and heating controls. The loss of this scheme will affect the availability of home improvements available and the availability of replacement gas boilers. Since January 2013, 6,042 households have received ECO measures in Darlington.

Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme

17. Darlington Borough Council, as part of a consortium, are working with E.ON Green Homes Funding Solutions to deliver energy efficiency improvements to homes under the Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme. Under this scheme eligible homes can receive up to £15,000 for energy performance measures and a further £15,000 for low-carbon heating. Following the publication of the government's Warm Homes Plan interest in the Warm Homes Local Grant Scheme has increased. We are expecting further interest from private landlords, who can also improve one of their properties at no cost, following the government announcement that privately rented properties will be required to reach the equivalent of an EPC band C by 1 October 2030.

Licensing

18. Darlington's Licensing Act 2003 Policy is due to be revised in October this year (5-year statutory cycle), and a report is with the Licensing Committee seeking approval for public consultation. Key issues for inclusion will be the new National Licensing Policy Framework released in November 2025, alcohol deliveries, spiking, illegal working and Martyn's Law.
19. The Street Trading Policy review is complete, and a report has been submitted to the Licensing Committee for consideration and approval. They will then make recommendations to Council for a final decision on its introduction. Key proposals will be a revised and reduced number of static town centre trading locations, due to a lack of interest from traders and the impact they can have on local businesses; static out-of-town trading locations limited to recognised laybys due to safety issues on the highway; a revised application process that will improve decision-making and transparency.
20. Funding for taxi marshals ends on 31 March, and there are no new funding streams. An exit strategy is being developed with key partners, along with a communication plan. With the introduction of app-based private hire companies such as Uber, demand for on-rank taxis has declined in recent years, and the number of taxis available in Darlington to meet peak-time demand has increased.
21. A new government consultation has commenced exploring the possibility of local transport authorities being responsible for taxi licensing. This closes on 1st April. If introduced, it will require a major piece of work to combine the processes of all Tees Valley Licensing Authorities and will have a significant impact on how the licensing service is delivered. With the recent approval of its revised Taxi Policy, Darlington is well-positioned should it be introduced.
22. Authority is being sought for the introduction of Fixed Penalty Tickets for animal welfare offences. If introduced, it will allow Licensing and Trading Standards to recover the costs of investigating unlicensed dog breeding, among other offences. This will be in accordance with DEFRA guidance. A report will be submitted to the next Licensing Committee to discuss the proposal and seek approval; the final decision will be made by the Council.
23. On 14 January, a Darlington woman was ordered to pay fines and costs totalling £262 after pleading guilty to the unlicensed selling of dogs and puppies. Since June 2022, she

advertised 24 dogs for sale, and if all sold for the asking price, would have made in excess of £11,000.

Benefit Enquiry Action Team (BEAT)

24. The Benefit Enquiry Action Team (BEAT) campaign continues to support residents from across the borough. Throughout 2025, the campaign benefitted from an extra boost in funding from the Household Support Fund, increasing capacity, and raising the total amount of extra income claimed by local people to £3.3m. On 19 February 2026 the campaign was shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Award within the Public / Private Partnership category, with the winners to be confirmed in June 2026.

Crisis and Resilience Fund

25. The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) has been made available to local authorities in England to support low-income households who encounter a financial shock and to support activity that builds individual and community financial resilience. The funding covers the period of 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029 inclusive. This includes specified funding for housing support.
26. CRF replaces Household Support Fund and introduces different objectives outlined below. It is intended as a shift from short-term emergency help under HSF, to a more preventative approach through a greater emphasis on building financial resilience. It also brings together key support into one simple, streamlined fund by incorporating Discretionary Housing Payments, making it easier for Authorities to deliver help and for people to access it.
27. The Housing Payment element will commence from April 2026 and replaces Discretionary Housing Payments with a phased transition.
28. The primary objective of The Fund is to both provide a safety net for those on low incomes who encounter a financial shock and to invest in building local financial resilience to enable individuals and communities to better deal with crises in the long-term, reducing crisis need.
29. Within the CRF, Authorities are encouraged to invest in 'Resilience Services' that contribute towards improving the financial resilience of individuals. Financial resilience refers to the ability of individuals to withstand and recover from financial shocks – such as sudden income loss or unexpected expenses.
30. The Fund will focus on three main outcomes:
 - (a) **Outcome 1: Provision of effective crisis support.** Delivering effective financial crisis support to prevent the occurrence or escalation of individuals' crises. This includes the provision of financial support towards housing needs, to those who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs.
 - (b) **Outcome 2: Improving individuals' financial resilience.** By strengthening financial resilience among individuals.

(c) **Outcome 3: Bolstering the local-level support landscape.**

A joined-up, visible local support network enabling those seeking crisis support to be appropriately referred to services that build their individual financial resilience.

31. Officers are currently working with colleagues in the voluntary sector to devise an effective programme.”

Councillor Garner
Stronger Communities Portfolio