

COUNCIL
25 APRIL 2019

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY SAFETY PORTFOLIO

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

Civic Enforcement Service

Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)

2. From 1 March 2019, Darlington Borough Council and Durham Constabulary have been able to utilise a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), which is a positive measure that enables the Council's Enforcement Officers to address anti-social behaviour in Darlington with the aim of delivering a better experience for everyone as they go about their day-to-day business in the town centre. Signage reminding people of the new legislation will go up around the town centre and all staff involved in enforcement activity will undergo training.

Anti-Social Behaviour in the Town Centre

3. In recent months, Darlington town centre has seen an increase in youth-related anti-social behaviour. The Anti-Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Team, along with the Police, have managed to identify all the young people involved and the Civic Enforcement Team have undertaken several interviews with young people and their parents.
4. A number of Acceptable Behaviour Agreements have been signed, with the majority of the young people involved referred to the Youth Offending Service to undertake a range of positive interventions to attempt to address their behaviour. On 22 February, the court granted a twelve month injunction with the power of arrest with a twelve month Parenting Order against one of the young people and the parent concerned. Unfortunately other attempts to address his behaviour had been unsuccessful.
5. Feedback from businesses in the town centre since the start of the interventions has been very positive.

Crime and Disorder

6. There has been a five per cent decrease in the number of reported crimes during the period 1 April to 28 February 2019 compared to the same period in 2018. This equates to a reduction of 578 crimes. Crimes showing an increase include: violence without injury (disorder), harassment and possession of weapons. Crimes showing a significant decrease include: theft, burglary and vehicle crime.

7. Whilst Darlington is currently showing a decrease in reported crime there are increases elsewhere in the Durham Constabulary area, with figures ranging from five per cent in East Durham to eight per cent in West Durham.
8. Darlington has also experienced a seven per cent decrease in all reported incidents to the police during the same period and anti-social behaviour is currently eleven per cent lower than last year.
9. An exception relating to increases in anti-social behaviour is the Eastbourne area, which is showing an increase of ten per cent when compared to similar periods last year.
10. Darlington Community Partnership and the Multi-Agency Problem Solving Group are currently working together to tackle these issues and have developed and completed a number of operations, initiatives and time limited work to reduce crime and disorder in the areas of exception.

Trading Standards

11. Trading Standards has disposed of thousands of pounds worth of counterfeit goods that had been seized and subsequently forfeited or signed over to the Team.
12. The goods, which included more than 300 items of clothing, around 30 dinner and tea sets as well as 50 sets of knives, were donated to His Church, a national charity that specialises in rebranding and redistributing counterfeit clothing. Once rebranding is complete, the clothing will go to First Stop, a local front-line charity that supports the homeless and other vulnerable people. Trading Standards will continue to ensure that, where possible, counterfeit goods, which come into the Team's possession, are rebranded and used for the benefit of others rather than being destroyed.
13. Trading Standards carried out internet checks on 10 traders to ensure that any claims made about membership of reputable trade and consumer organisations were genuine. The traders included garages, window installers and gas engineers and the claims made included Gas Safe accreditation, FENSA registration and the use of Check Safe and Checked and Vetted logos. All claims were found to be correct. Trading Standards publicised the outcome and offered tips on how to find a trusted trader.
14. Trading Standards led Operation Red Panda, an illegal tobacco operation, which was carried out on 30 January 2019 with support from the Police and HMRC. More than 7,000 cigarettes and 0.9kg (18 packs) of hand-rolling tobacco were seized. A criminal investigation is on-going.
15. Trading Standards has also carried out legal compliance inspections of a number of car traders within Darlington as part of a local market surveillance project.
16. On 1 February 2019 as a result of information received, Trading Standards put out a warning via the Council's social media to prevent people falling victim to a telephone preference service phone scam. Facebook and Twitter activity checks showed that the warning had a reach of nearly 13,000.

17. Trading Standards also participated in the Food Standards Agency's National Animal Feed Delivery Programme. This is priority work because unsafe feed not only impacts on the health and welfare of animals, but also has the potential to contaminate meat that could ultimately pose a threat to public health and compromise trade.

Private Sector Housing

Landlord Civil Penalties

18. Work is underway that will allow the Private Sector Housing Team to fine private landlords who flout housing regulations. 'Civic Penalties' can be used as an alternative to prosecuting landlords, which will often take longer and at a greater cost to the Council. Introduced under the Housing and Planning Act 2016, this applies to offences under the Housing Act 2004 and a maximum penalty of £30,000 can be applied for the most serious housing breaches.

Purple Flag

19. This award is a benchmark for good night time destinations, meaning Darlington would be regarded as a safe, diverse, vibrant, appealing and well managed place to visit. The initial bid was submitted in April and is judged on levels of crime/ASB, impact on public health, choice of activities, footfall, people's perceptions of how safe they are, levels of economic activity and the diversity of the patrons (age, gender, etc.).

Street Friends

20. Darlington Street Friends initiative held launch events in January and February 2019 and has achieved significant success so far; notably providing direct assistance to four vulnerable individuals and preventing incidents from escalating. It is estimated that purely in financial terms it has saved the NHS alone over £1,000, as well as the potential workloads removed from the police/door staff/etc.

Hate Crime

21. On 4 March, the Joint Hate Crime Action Group launched a new Hate Crime Communications Strategy featuring consistent impactful branding for leaflets, posters and social media, using the strap line 'Hate Hurts'. This will be used in all communications across the Darlington and Durham areas to increase awareness and encourage reporting of hate crime, and ultimately to discourage perpetrators.

Licensing

22. The Licensing Department conducted a joint operation with officers from Durham Constabulary Alcohol Harm Reduction Unit in early February. The operation concentrated on visiting the premises in the known hotspots and licensees were advised of their responsibilities in relation to underage sales and informed that offenders are at risk of action being taken against their premises licence.

23. In conjunction with the above operation into under age drinking, checks were carried out on the Darlington taxi trade to ensure that fare paying passengers were not being over-charged. One licensed Hackney Carriage driver has been reported for failing to engage his meter when hired and will be cautioned by the Licensing Department regarding his future conduct.

Councillor Helen Crumbie
Community Safety Portfolio