

**COUNCIL  
5 DECEMBER 2019**

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**OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO**

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

**Civic Enforcement Service**

**National Award for Dog Warden Service**

2. Darlington's Dog Warden Service has once again been awarded the Stray Dog Gold Standard in the RSPCA's Paw Prints Awards. The scheme rewards those organisations exceeding basic and statutory service requirements with the aim of achieving higher animal welfare standards.

**Back Lanes Initiative**

3. Community Services and partners, including Durham Constabulary and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue, launched an initiative to tackle problems associated with fly-tipping and dumping waste in back lanes on 15 October.
4. The project aims to educate residents in relation to bin collections, issue bin stickers in an attempt to encourage people to take responsibility for their property and provide education regarding the consequences of offending. The work will also involve local surveys and engagement with landlords around their responsibilities.
5. This is a pilot project, which if successful will be extended to other areas of the borough. The areas selected for the initiative (based on Darlington Borough Council and CDDFR data) include:
  - (a) Brighton / Lewes / Falmer
  - (b) China / Ruby / Dublin
  - (c) Bedford Street / Clifton Road area
  - (d) Chandos / Barron / Wilson
  - (e) Beaconsfield / Salisbury / Barningham

**Trading Standards**

6. On 26 and 27 September 2019, Trading Standards participated in Operation Haddock, a multi-agency operation supported by Darlington and Tees Valley Authorities, DVSA, HMRC and Police to conduct checks on waste carriers.

7. Trading Standard's role was to carry out weighbridge checks on vehicles and their loads, inspect licensed scrap yards as part of multi-disciplinary visits, and deal with any issues that arose.
8. On 3 October 2019, Robin Howe, Quantity Surveyor from Northallerton, was found guilty of fraud by abuse of position under Section 1 of the Fraud Act 2006 after being prosecuted by the Authority following an investigation by Trading Standards. Mr Howe provided a quantity surveying service for Darlington victims who wanted to extend their home. He used his position to promote the services of a particular builder, who was awarded the contract, and encouraged staged payments to the builder despite problems with the work being carried out. He also failed to disclose to the victims that he had received an 'introductory fee' from the builder. .
9. Trading Standards delivered a 'hot topic' session on the subject 'Trade Fairly, Trade Successfully' as part of this year's Darlington Business Week. The session highlighted Better Business for All (BBfA), a Government initiative to strengthen relationships that regulatory services have with local businesses and remove regulatory barriers to growth. Trading Standards also showcased a video, produced under the BBfA initiative, of a local trader on his positive experiences with regulatory services in Darlington.

## **Private Sector Housing**

### **Gas Safety**

10. Further to the national Gas Safety Week campaign in September 2019, the Private Sector Housing Team continue to make sure that any gas appliances and flues provided for tenants are safe for continued used. Landlords must arrange for gas safety appliances to be safety checked every twelve months by a Gas Safe Registered Engineer.

### **Houses in Multiple Occupation**

11. A review of the safety certification for licensed houses in multiple occupation has been carried out over the past four months. Certification for all properties has been reviewed, including: gas safety certificates, electrical conditional reports and fire safety risk assessments.
12. The Authority currently has 35 licensed houses in multiple occupation; properties where there are two of more households sharing amenities with five or more occupiers.

## **PREVENT**

13. The Community Resilience Officer continues to deliver WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) 'train the trainer' sessions in partnership with Durham County Council colleagues.

## **Community Engagement**

14. The Community Resilience Officer attended the Darlington Unity Group meeting, chaired by Chief Inspector Steve Ball. Initial ideas discussed, included: encouraging young people to join the group and engage in community building activities; improving the representation of the group to include LGBTQ+, Jewish and Polish communities and others; organising more community events to be attended by a more diverse audience.

## **Hate Crime Awareness Week (12 – 19 October)**

15. The Joint Hate Crime Action Group reciprocally supported and promoted all participating organisations' activities during Hate Crime Awareness Week. Darlington Borough Council continues to utilise the 'Hate Hurts' campaign and communications pack provided by the Durham PCVC earlier in the year.

## **Purple Flag**

16. The Disability Sub-Group met for the first time on 26 September, chaired by the Community Resilience Officer. The discussion focussed on the idea of an award scheme for shops, restaurants, bars and other service providers that met a minimum standard set out by the scheme.

## **Licensing**

17. The Licensing Division co-ordinated the week long 'Operation Haddock', which was aimed at tackling metal theft by targeting unlicensed scrap metal collectors. Prior to its commencement in late September, awareness raising took place through the press and social media, which then concluded with enforcement throughout the Tees Valley area.
18. Licensing have been working with Police and Immigration Officers targeting licensed premises in the town centre where intelligence suggests there are illegal workers. Intelligence has been developed during multi-agency inspections to ensure these premises are compliant with the Licensing Act legislation.

**Councillor Jonathan Dulston**  
**Stronger Communities**