

COUNCIL
30 JANUARY 2020

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the main areas of work under my Health and Housing Portfolio were as follows:-

Dolphin Centre Ten Pin Bowling

2. Cabinet has approved the release of funding to install a five-lane ten pin bowling alley and for an extension to the existing soft play facility within the Dolphin Centre.
3. The provision of a bowling alley was borne from the recent Town Centre Strategy Consultation and the introduction of the facilities will improve the family and teen offer within the Dolphin Centre.

Public Health

4. The first meeting of the Darlington Childhood Healthy Weight Plan Engagement Group has been held to agree a series of actions to begin implementing the plan. This will include targeted work with schools to provide a consistent approach including:
 - (a) Daily mile / physical activity
 - (b) Healthy catering
 - (c) Encouraging active travel
5. A second wave of NHS England funding has been awarded to Darlington specifically for grass roots projects that support suicide prevention. Four projects were awarded funding for the following initiatives:
 - (a) A school-based inclusive community garden
 - (b) Training sessions for 11-18-year olds to build emotional resilience
 - (c) Peer support groups for men experiencing poor mental health
 - (d) Men's IT "shed", personal development sessions and Job Club

Health and Well Being Board

6. The Darlington Health and Well Being Board has not met since my last report.

Sheltered Housing Project

7. The Sheltered Housing programme has engaged 154 residents from the sheltered housing schemes within the town. The gentle activity sessions are offered to all residents and there are 15 sessions set-up weekly. The majority of the residents are aged 60 years plus. The activity sessions have had 2681 attendances during 2019.

8. As well as physical activity, the Move More Team have brought in different events for the residents to improve their social activities. Choirs, museums, dance groups, 'techy' coffee mornings, arts and crafts, and beauty sessions have been held within the sheltered housing project. There have been 649 attendances at these events since the start of the project.

Health in Haughton Matters

9. The Health in Haughton project launched in October 2019 with the Move More Team working alongside the Haughton Residents Association to deliver sport and physical activity in the Haughton area. The project was launched with Archery, Couch 2 5k, Gentle Exercise Class, Family Xplorer and a Health Walk. So far the project has engaged over 70 local residents with new activities introduced in the New Year including, Walking Netball and a Fit Mamas group.

In2 Project

10. The In2 programme is aimed to use sport and the arts as early intervention tools to address aspiration, behavioural and health and wellbeing challenges in school age children. The programme enables participants to access and engage with a wide range of cultural and sporting activities which would not normally be available to them.
11. In December, 30 Year 7 and 8 pupils, who are part of the programme, attended Ted Fletcher Court to give a fresh coat of paint to garden benches and they helped to make the hen coop at the scheme ship-shape for winter. The pupils worked alongside Henpower staff to create and design some ideas for the outside space as well as refurbishing items in the garden and around the hen coop. Their hard work was rewarded afterwards with a visit to Darlington Hippodrome to watch the pantomime, Jack and the Beanstalk.

Housing Income

12. We have made significant improvements in reducing levels of rent arrears, with the amount outstanding at around the same level as this time last year. This is despite the number of our tenants receiving Universal Credit almost doubling over that period. This is particularly impressive, as Universal Credit is paid monthly in arrears, as opposed to Housing Benefit which is paid weekly in advance.
13. Our Housing Income Team take a proactive approach to all tenants in rent arrears, including Tenancy Sustainment Officers providing support and early intervention to tenants in receipt of Universal Credit, offering budgeting and money advice. In particular, we have focused on helping our tenants manage and prioritise their Universal Credit payments to ensure priority debts, such as rent, are paid. We also offer digital support to help tenants access their on-line Universal Credit journals to report changes and any problems to the DWP, to ensure that payments reflect their current circumstances.

14. We have also assisted tenants in making over 400 applications to Northumbrian Water for their Social Tariff funding, which has meant that since April, nearly £90,000 has been awarded to Council tenants to help reduce their water rates bills.

Councillor Lorraine Tostevin
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Health and Housing