

COUNCIL

30 January 2020

OVERVIEW OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO

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

Equalities

2. A three-hour training session has been developed for all staff and Elected Members on equality, diversity, dignity and respect. Since January, there have been three sessions a week running, which have been advertised through the briefing, posters and 'loo news'. There will be more than 200 members of staff trained by the end of February 2020.

Civic Enforcement Service

Closure Notice

3. A Premises Closure Notice was granted at Peterlee Magistrates Court in December for 88 Surtees Street, Darlington. These premises were involved in the drugs trade for some time and were successfully boarded up on Friday 10 January 2020. The dwelling will remain closed for a period of three months whilst the landlord seeks new suitable tenants. The previous tenants of the property and visitors had caused endless problems throughout the day and night for other residents trying to live peaceful lives. This Closure Order will ensure the neighbours and businesses in nearby streets will finally have some respite.

Back Lanes Project Update

4. The 15 streets involved in this pilot project are within Pierremont, Northgate, Bank Top and North Road Wards and have received a letter in relation to the project. A 'bin register' has been set up in certain streets identifying all household wheeled bins in the hope that any 'rogue' bins are identified quickly and removed reducing the risk of arson. Enforcement will be introduced in the next phase of the project. We continue to work closely with the Fire Service on visual audits, etc.

Parking Annual Report

5. The Parking Annual Report was published on the Council's website in December and covers the enforcement, appeals and finance aspects of parking for the financial year.

Community Safety

Purple Flag

6. The aim of Purple Flag is to raise the standard and broaden the appeal of town and city centres at night. It is the benchmark for good night time destinations.

Town and city centres that achieve a Purple Flag will be those that are safe, diverse, vibrant, appealing, well-managed and offer a positive experience to consumers. Darlington and its partners were assessed for accreditation on Friday 6 December 2019.

7. Following a rigorous assessment process and a meeting of the National Awards Panel held on 16 January 2020, Darlington has been officially awarded “Purple Flag” status in recognition of our evening and night-time offer in the town centre. The assessors and panel were “highly impressed” with our application which clearly reflects the time, energy and commitment of all who have made this award possible.
8. The Purple Flag Working Group will meet to debrief the award and focus on our next steps of the journey which will include the development and implementation of an Evening and Night-Time Strategy in Darlington. The Purple Flag and Certificate will be presented at an awards ceremony in April 2020.

Darlington Community Safety Partnership (CSP) 2020-2025

9. Members of Darlington Community Safety Partnership attended a planning event on Tuesday 17 December 2019 to discuss and formulate priorities for the Darlington Community Safety Plan 2020-2025. Following extended discussion, initial priorities were identified as: reducing domestic abuse, supporting vulnerable people, promoting safer places and improving community cohesion. Further consultation will take place early in 2020 prior to the launch in April 2020.

Trading Standards

10. On 13 November 2019, Robin Howe from Yarm and previously from Morton on Swale, Northallerton, was sentenced at South Tyneside Magistrates’ Court after being found guilty of fraud following a two-day trial at Gateshead Magistrates’ Court.
11. Mr Howe was found guilty of fraud by abuse of position under the Fraud Act 2006 after being prosecuted following an investigation by Trading Standards.
12. He was sentenced to a twelve months’ Community Order, with a requirement to complete 300 hours of unpaid work and ordered to pay £3,505 in prosecution costs, along with a £90 victim surcharge.

Private Sector Housing

Warm Homes Project

13. Approval was sought from Cabinet in early December to participate in a Tees Valley Partnership to deliver Warm Homes Fund Project. Participation in the project will deliver energy efficiency improvements for qualifying residents in the borough. The project will:
 - (a) Provide gas central heating to properties not connected to the gas network.

- (b) Provide air source heat pumps to rural properties where there is no available gas network.
 - (c) Provide advice to those in fuel poverty.
14. Fuel poverty levels in and associated problems will be reduced. Fuel poverty levels when last recorded in 2015, showed that 14.1 per cent of residents were in fuel poverty representing 6,663 households.
 15. Work is currently being undertaken in conjunction with the Citizens Advice Bureau to identify vulnerable households who will qualify for the scheme and how this project will be communicated.

The Northgate Initiative

16. The introduction of an initiative in the Northgate Ward will comprise a multi-agency programme to pilot a range of interventions, from support to advice to enforcement activities where required in order to improve outcomes for residents in all areas of wellbeing, including: economy, education and childhood, health, environment and social relationships.
17. Northgate Ward has one of the highest concentrations of private rented property in the Borough. As part of this initiative, the Private Sector Housing team will be focusing on:
 - (a) making residents and landlords aware of what constitutes a decent and safe home and ensuring they are aware of the what remedies are available to them should their home not meet these standards; and
 - (b) identifying long-term empty properties and how they can be brought back into use.

PREVENT

Self-Assessment Toolkit

18. The Community Resilience Officer has completed the Council's Prevent actions within the self-assessment toolkit and will be working with Durham County Council to summarise all partner assessments into a single Silver Board document once they are submitted in early 2020.

Community Engagement

19. A meeting was held with the Jewish community in the Darlington Synagogue to discuss their concerns over security and antisemitic groups. The Community Resilience Officer is now working with Durham Constabulary Special Branch to provide guidance and organise further larger-scale talks.
20. The Community Resilience Officer met with an Indian community in Mowden, following a burglary at one of their properties, which was the second such offence within six months. A meeting has been arranged with the Police to resolve communication issues and resources have been put in place to alleviate immediate

concerns.

Road Safety Scheme for Schools

21. Following an incident involving a young boy close to Mowden School, the Community Resilience Officer met with the head teacher and an action plan has been produced. The pupil involved has now returned to school and is continuing his recovery.
22. Working alongside the Highways section, the Community Resilience Officer has now met with five schools (inclusive of Mowden School) in a pilot programme and all have given a positive response to the enhanced scheme proposal. Although an official launch is planned for 24 February, the programme has commenced, and vehicle registrations reported by schools to be illegally parked are being processed and warning notices sent from the Police and Darlington Borough Council.

Purple Flag - Disability Sub-Group

23. The 'Disability Sub-Group' met for the third time in December just prior to the Purple Flag assessment in Darlington on 6 December. The meeting was chaired by the Community Resilience Officer and discussion focussed on the idea of an award scheme for shops, restaurants, bars and other service providers who met the minimum standards set out by the scheme. A draft charter was also presented to the group for feedback prior to circulating to other groups and partners (including businesses) for their comments.

Licensing

Operation Winter

24. Licensing have been working with Immigration Enforcement Officers on an intelligence-led operation targeting licensed premises believed to be using illegal workers. Out of four premises inspected, one was believed to have been using illegal workers, however, it was strongly suspected that staff had been alerted to the ongoing operation just prior to arrival. Arrangements have been made with Immigration Officers to make further unannounced visits who will seek additional powers of entry owing to the added intelligence gained as a result of this operation.
25. Two Town Centre venues have been closely monitored by partners with a view to taking them to a licensing review on the grounds of failing to meet the crime and disorder objective. The police licensing solicitor considered there was enough evidence for a review on one of those premises, however there had been a change in the management and a period of consolidation was required to ensure the new management was having an effect. The premises has been closely monitored since then and improvements have been made. It will continue to be monitored and reviewed if necessary along with the other high risk premises.

Animal Welfare

26. Licensing have been working closely with partners to identify and disrupt potential 'puppy farming' activities. The new Animal Welfare Regulations have raised awareness with the public who have provided actionable intelligence for early intervention. This is linked to organised crime and licensing has an important role in

disrupting these activities.

Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

27. Licensing are in the process of developing a new Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for Darlington. This is currently in draft form and a proposed stakeholder event will take place early in the New Year to finalise this strategy, which will be for a five year period. It will incorporate an action plan, which will be monitored by Darlington's Community Safety Partnership Board.

Taxi and Licensing Act Consultation

28. During 2020 there will be a statutory requirement to consult on the new Taxi and Licensing Act policies for implementation in January 2021.
29. Drafts of these policies will be produced early in the New Year and approval will be sought from the Licensing Committee to consult with the wider community before final policies are presented to the Committee for approval.

Crime and Disorder

30. There has been a four per cent increase in the number of reported crimes during the period 1 April to 30 November 2019 compared to the same period in 2018. This equates to an increase of 329 crimes. Crimes showing an increase include: violence against the person and sexual. Crimes showing a significant decrease include: theft and burglary.

Anti-Social Behaviour in the Town Centre

31. There has been a three per cent increase in the number of reported ASB incidents in the Town Centre during this period compared to the same period in 2018. This equates to ten incidents. Darlington as a whole shows a two per cent decrease, this equates to a reduction 55 incidents.

Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Stronger Communities Portfolio