

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2020 (This meeting is cancelled)

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. Councillor Darrien Wright has been appointed as the Council's Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Ambassador (LGBT).
3. Training continues to be held for all staff on equality, diversity, dignity and respect. Over 450 members of staff have now been trained and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.
4. In relation to Member training, the session has been split into two sessions, 23 Members have attended session 1, with 25 Members attending session 2. Further sessions will be arranged and I would encourage those Members who have not yet been able to attend to do so once the dates have been confirmed.

Purple Flag

5. 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.
6. The Disability Sub-Group met for the third time on 3 December 2019 prior to the Purple Flag assessment in Darlington on 6 December 2019. The discussion focused again 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 and a draft charter was circulated for comment.
7. The charter is currently being modified and will be taken back to the group for approval before being circulated to other groups and partners (including businesses) for their comments.
8. The LGBT Group also met before Christmas to discuss the night-time economy and the results of a survey that Darlington ARQ had sent out. Some themes emerged that were in common with the Disability Group - staff training, information, public attitudes, etc. Work on this strand has stalled temporarily following Darlington ARQ closing in early January 2020.
9. Darlington and its partners were assessed for accreditation on Friday 6 December 2019 and were subsequently awarded 'Purple Flag' in recognition of the high standards and offer in Darlington. Indeed, Darlington has now been nominated for the Jim Ratchford Award for outstanding contribution to safety and diversity in the night-time economy. The work of the Council in relation to the two groups detailed above and Purple Flag was commented upon very favourably in the Purple Flag

assessment report.

COVID-19

10. I am aware there is a lot of concern in our communities and amongst our staff in relation to COVID-19 (Coronavirus). Officers have been reviewing the Council's Business Continuity Plans to ensure they are fit for purpose should they be required. There is a daily meeting of officers including the Managing Director, Public Health colleagues, as well as other senior representatives, to plan and react to the fast-changing environment. The Council is also working closely with its partners in the Local Resilience Forum, which includes all of the statutory agencies such as police, fire, health, local authorities, voluntary sector and others, again, working together to plan for a response to any emergency.
11. Additional cleaning arrangements have been put in place in our public buildings and Council offices.
12. We will continue to follow the Government's lead, and should the public need any further advice or information, the appropriate links to the NHS website are available on the Council's website.

Community Safety

Closure Notice

13. A Premises Closure Notice was granted for 88 Surtees Street, Darlington at Peterlee Magistrates Court on Friday 20 December 2019 for a period of three months. These premises were involved in the supply of controlled drugs for some time, impacting on the quality of life of residents in the area.

Re-Deployable CCTV

14. Following a successful trial of deployable cameras in Darlington, a decision has been made to purchase an additional five cameras for use throughout the Borough.
15. In order to prepare for the extended use of re-deployable cameras, a policy has been drafted to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. It is expected that the additional cameras will be delivered and deployed in the next two months.

Covert CCTV

16. The Community Safety Partnership have recently sponsored the purchase of two covert camera kits to tackle the problems associated with environmental crime (fly-tipping) in Darlington.

Road Safety Scheme for Schools

17. Working alongside the Highways Division and the Police, the Community Resilience Officer has now visited six schools in a pilot programme, and all have given a positive response to the enhanced scheme proposal. An official launch was planned for 24 February 2020 but it has been problematical arranging meetings with all of the schools so this official launch date has been put back. Firthmoor Primary School has decided not to take part in the scheme due to concerns that staff or pupils may be subject to abuse if they try to monitor parking

near the school. Some schools have already commenced activity and 35 vehicle registrations have been reported to be illegally parked and are being processed and sent warning notices from the Police and Darlington Borough Council. A database has been set up to record incidents and identify repeat offenders.

18. £7000 funding has also been awarded to the scheme from the Police Crime and Victim Commissioner to support the pilot.

Community Engagement

19. A meeting was recently held with the Jewish community in the Darlington Synagogue to discuss their concerns over security and antisemitic groups. Further guidance was provided in terms of personal and building security with the help of Special Branch. A Prevent talk was delivered to the group on 29 February 2020.
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 security concerns.
21. The Community Resilience Officer attended the meeting of the Darlington Unity Group chaired by Chief Inspector Steve Ball on 29 January 2020 at Kings Church, Darlington. A representative of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers attended for the first time together with the Head of Corporation School and new members from the West Indian Association and Sikh community who are keen to be involved in the group.
22. The group have agreed four key strands of work, in addition to looking at any emerging issues.
 - (a) Educating the Unity Group membership - a short presentation delivered by a group member at each meeting (15 mins) on their community/religion to provide a better understanding for the rest of the group.
 - (b) Communities to provide/facilitate opportunities for organisations to educate their staff - visits to Mosque/Church, meetings with key members of the community, formalised training, etc. Corporation School have already agreed to organise meetings with their students to discuss their issues in Darlington as a young person. The Sikh representative offered visits to the Gurdwara and GRT has offered visits to local sites.
 - (c) Police to work with communities to increase their knowledge about careers in the Police service. This has already had some success with a PCSO being recruited. This may be expanded to include County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue, Darlington Borough Council and other public sector organisations.
 - (d) Attract a younger/new membership to the Unity Group and look at opportunities for activities for younger people.

PREVENT

23. The Community Resilience Officer has completed the Prevent self-assessment toolkit and worked closely with partners to develop a Silver Board document, which is now effective in County Durham and Darlington.
24. In support of the plan two Education Prevent Seminars will be hosted by Darlington College on 4 and 5 May 2020. 3.5 hours of training on Prevent (locally and nationally) will be delivered by Special Branch and the Community Resilience Officer to safeguarding professionals and heads.

Trading Standards

25. Following an investigation by Trading Standards, a trader who operates on Darlington's outdoor market, pleaded guilty at Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Court to 8 toy safety offences in relation to the possession for supply of dangerous squishy toys and for applying his own stickers, bearing fake CE marks, to those types of toys.
26. The trader was sentenced to a fine and costs of £1134.00 and an application for forfeiture of all the items seized was granted.
27. Trading Standards has collaborated with Durham Police, Durham Agency Against Crime and Public Health to deliver a campaign which aims to raise awareness of the problems caused by the sale of illegal tobacco products, particularly to under-age children and encourages the public to report any issues to Trading Standards. Darlington College art and design students were given a brief to create a series of posters for the campaign. A panel of judges representing the partners in the campaign chose the winning designs, which will be displayed in bus shelters at key sites in the town. The winning and runner-up designs will be used to promote the campaign through social media.

Private Sector Housing

Warm Homes Project

28. Approval was given by Cabinet in early December 2019 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 funding will:
 - (a) Install 1000 boilers and provide gas connections across the area.
 - (b) Install 200 air source heat pumps - renewable heating provision in rural areas.
 - (c) Assist 10,000 households with fuel poverty issues.
29. This will provide over £5,500,000 in funding across the partnership area.
30. Fuel poverty levels and associated problems in the Borough 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.
31. 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.

32. The programme will run from contract date December 2019 to December 2021 (24-month programme), to be finalised February 2022. The first letters to targeted properties were sent out in February 2020.

Private Rented Sector Innovation and Enforcement Grant

33. A bid was submitted on 1 December 2019, to apply for funds under the Private Rented Sector Innovation and Enforcement Grant. This application was granted on 31 December 2019 for £59,300. The fund is to support projects which take effective and targeted action against criminal landlords, support good landlords in fulfilling their responsibilities and empower tenants to make good use of their rights.
34. The purpose of the bid is to:
- (a) Understand local housing conditions and how this affects health across populations. Enabling improved enforcement to secure health improvements and reduce health inequalities in areas of deprivation.
 - (b) Improve local knowledge of the communities and housing standards in the private sector.
 - (c) Enable intelligent targeting and proactive inspections to tackle unsafe and poor quality housing, by utilising data sets and through the development of housing stock modelling and tenant modelling.
 - (d) Provide an intelligence led approach to identify the worst landlords who will be challenged through effective and robust enforcement. This will provide improved and healthier living conditions for the most vulnerable across Darlington. Following the introduction of a Civil Penalty policy, all financial penalties will be reinvested in improving housing conditions for all residents of Darlington.
35. This will assist in the first stage of the Northgate Initiative in gathering, analysing and presenting baseline data to support and direct the project.

The Northgate Initiative

36. 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.
37. 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 are aware of the what remedies are available to them should their home not meet these standards.
 - (b) Assisting in the reduction of long empty properties in the area.

Data Analysis

Crime and Disorder

38. There has been a six per cent increase in the number of reported crimes during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 January 2020 compared to the same period in 2018/19. This equates to an increase of 604 crimes. Crimes showing an increase include: violence against the person and sexual offences. Crimes showing a significant decrease include Theft of a Pedal Cycle and Arson.

Anti-Social Behaviour

39. There has been a one per cent decrease in the number of reported Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) incidents in Darlington during this period compared to the same period in 2018/19. This equates to a reduction 32 incidents.

Licensing

Taxi Licensing Policy

40. Work has commenced on writing the new policy for implementation on 1 January 2021. A draft will be ready for the Licensing Committee in May to approve its release for consultation. Although there will be no radical changes, one of the main issues will be around emissions. By 1 April 2023 all taxi and private hire vehicles must be no older than 8 years of age and comply with Euro VI engine specifications. Most of the current fleet are already Euro VI compliant and there will be incentives for those who have vehicles that produce zero emissions.
41. All drivers will be required to sign up to the DBS Update Service and checks will be made annually (they are currently every three years). Future applicants will see an increase in the length of time a criminal conviction will prohibit the granting of a licence in line with guidance from the Institute of Licensing. The policy will also see some relaxation of conditions where appropriate to assist the trade.

Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

42. A draft of this strategy has been produced and was discussed at a stakeholder workshop on the 19 February 2020, before completion and launch in early Spring. There will be three key themes; Prevention; Control; Treatment. An action plan will be developed around these themes in line with priorities linked to Corporate Plans for Darlington. It is intended that a lead individual will be identified for each element of the action plan who will report directly to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

Licensing Act Policy Review

43. This review will be commenced in Spring and is for implementation in January 2021. A draft policy will be ready for the Licensing Committee in May to approve its release for consultation. Any changes will be made in line with the release of the Government's Section 182 Guidance published in 2018. There have been no major changes other than the Immigration Act 2016 giving Home Office Enforcement Officers greater influence in dealing with licenced premises.

Floods and Water Management Act

44. Council staff worked in partnership with other agencies and communities to respond to the impact of Storm Ciara. The River Tees rose rapidly to the highest recorded levels and this had impacts at a number of locations. The Council worked to warn and inform those who may have been affected and assisted with deployment of sandbags to help to protect property.
45. From a preventative perspective the Council is working in partnership with Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency on a study to identify the impact of flooding on Darlington; this will inform the management and response to flood events and inform any investment that may be needed. In addition, the Council has commissioned further work to understand the impact of various scenarios on the culverts and bridges that exist across the Borough and how they would cope under various scenarios in terms of flood intensity and their capacity. This will also assist in the management of flood events and prioritisation of investment and response.

Councillor Jonathan Dulston
STRONGER COMMUNITIES PORTFOLIO