

**OVERVIEW OF HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

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1. The following were the main areas of work under my Housing Portfolio:-

**Homelessness**

2. The Homelessness Forum comprising of some 40 representatives from the statutory, voluntary and private sector, as well as service users, met on 4th August to review progress on improving services in terms of homeless prevention and support to vulnerable people. Progress to date includes:

- The establishment of a Mediation Service by Housing and the Community Legal Services to work with landlords, tenants and families who are in dispute and mediation may prevent individuals becoming homeless. This service will be particularly useful for resolving difficulties between young people and their families.
- The development of protocols with voluntary and statutory agencies dealing with young people, substance misusers and those discharged from hospital.
- Working with the charity First Stop to reduce rough sleeping in Darlington by providing them with financial support to give up to four rough sleepers a personal support worker who will assist with the purchase of clothing and other essential items as well as securing accommodation.
- A continuation of the Housing Division's Tenancy Support Scheme which at any one time is supporting 36 tenants for up to two years by helping individuals set and meet personal goals and ambitions and avoid repeat homelessness.

**Tenants Panel**

3. To improve our consultation and increase the empowerment of Council tenants I am working with a Steering Group of Officers and tenants to develop a Tenants Panel to deal exclusively with housing management issues. Whilst proposals are still in development, we are looking to develop an Executive Group of Members, Officers and Tenants which will feed into the Cabinet and Scrutiny process as well as specific task groups. The first task group is already established and has met three times to consider improvements to the Housing Repairs Service.

### **Darlington Active Independent and Staying Young (DAISY)**

4. The annual launch of DAISY took place on 27th August 2004 in the Market Square. DAISY, Darlington, Active, Independent and Staying Young, is organised by the Housing Division's Warden Services and GOLD - Growing Older Living in Darlington. DAISY aims to raise awareness of sheltered accommodation within Darlington, promote active ageing and healthy lifestyles, and encourage the over 50's to get involved in new activities and events.
5. An autumn of over 50 DAISY events is planned with DAISY Day 2004 being the main event in the DAISY calendar. Over 1000 people attended an afternoon of live entertainment, music, dancing, and guest speakers. Free guidance and advice was available for the over 50's, from 23 information stands, with advice on such matters as foot care, exercise, finance, and education opportunities. Two GEM, (Get Everyone Motivated), keep fit demonstrations were also held.
6. Alpha Radio covered the event, while the indoor market and market traders generously donated raffle prizes. A sum of £450 was raised and presented to St Teresa's Hospice.

### **Codeman**

7. The Housing Division has recently implemented a new computer system to monitor, in greater detail, the attributes of the Council's housing stock. Codeman, will compliment and interact with, the Orchard Housing Management System, and record nearly 800 individual pieces of information about each of the 5800 Council dwellings. This information includes details about the type and condition of such matters as kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, wall and roof construction, as well as external features such as parking provision and fencing.
8. Codeman also has the capability to assess the number of dwellings that meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard and make appropriate future projections, as well as calculate the SAP Rating (Energy Efficiency) of the Council housing stock. The system will enhance our business planning by calculating replacement costs for individual attributes and recommending options for 30 years investment programmes, taking account different resource scenarios. It can also hold pictures of dwellings, together with plans and other information that will be of benefit to existing and prospective tenants.
9. Codeman is currently being populated with all the required information. This should enable the system to work to its full capacity later this year.

### **Grace Court**

10. On 3rd August 2004, I officially opened Grace Court, a new accommodation scheme specifically for teenage mothers. The development, on land acquired from the Council, has been undertaken by Tees Valley Housing Group and comprises 6 two bedroom apartments for rent, together with communal facilities. Young mothers were involved in the design process to ensure the accommodation met the needs of young single parents. Specialist

multi-agency support is on hand to provide advice and training linked to Social Services, Health and Education and is being integrated within the Council's Sure Start programme, The communal lounge and facilities allow space for parents and their children to socialize informally and to attend classes and activities.

11. The apartments and facilities assist the Council in meeting its obligations to provide supported accommodation for all single 16-18 year old mothers as set out in the Government's Social Exclusion Unit report on teenage pregnancy.
12. On the same site Tees Valley Housing Group has developed nine 2, 3 and 4 bedroom general needs houses for rent, one of which has been specifically designed to wheelchair standards.

**Councillor Bill Dixon**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Housing**