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**OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. The following were the main areas of work under my Community and Public Protection Portfolio:-

**St George's Hall**

2. The official opening of St George's Hall for predominantly young single homeless people took place on 27th October 2005 and the scheme started taking its first residents shortly after. In total there are 11 self-contained flats, one of which is suitable for a wheelchair user and one double room. There will be a support worker available on site 24 hours a day, 7 days per week and it will provide a much needed resource to assist us in meeting our statutory homeless responsibilities to vulnerable people including those leaving care.

**Darlington Private Sector Housing Energy Efficiency Scheme**

3. A new partnership formed in April 2005 between Housing Services, Npower and Insta Fibre Consortium is proving highly successful. By the end of October £33,000 of the original budget of £50,000 has been spent and this has been used to lever in an additional £155,000 from Npower in their work with vulnerable people to provide cavity wall and loft insulation for free. A contribution of half the total cost is required from able to pay customers, which has levered in a further £33,000. The original target to increase the number of heat efficient homes during the year by 750 has already been exceeded and the project has five more months to run. The scheme is now operating throughout the Borough and a commitment has been made to provide additional Council resources as match funding if this is required to meet the demand.

**Housing and Supporting People Inclusive Forum**

4. The second Inclusive Forum to take place this year was held on 20th October in the Dolphin Centre. A wide range of housing and support providers attended including representatives from the Darlington and District Private Landlords Association, in addition to colleagues from Adult Services, Children's Services and the wider Housing and Supporting People teams. Discussions centred on the issues of move on accommodation and the new Private Sector Housing regime and our draft Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. It proved to be a very useful event in terms of getting behind the barriers to delivering a quicker move on accommodation process, and identified a number of ways of improving this, including setting up a group to look at common reference forms for prospective tenants. The Forum then discussed the impending change to Private Sector Housing, and whilst broadly supporting the proposed changes to the Private Sector Renewal Strategy, helped identify a

number of areas for improvement and needs for greater understanding of the current position in relation to issues such as empty properties and non-decent private sector dwellings. The Private Landlords who attended requested a seminar to give them the opportunity to better understand the issues they would need to address as part of the Housing Act 2004 requirements, and what Darlington's approach will be. It was therefore agreed to invite all landlords to such an event.

### **Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour**

5. Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour continue to be a key area of concern for Council tenants. All Housing Management Officers and especially the Tenancy Enforcement Officer meet regularly with colleagues in Community Safety and the Police to build on the links already established to develop shared working and best practices.

Since July the following enforcement actions have been undertaken:-

- 1 Acceptable Behaviour Contract signed
  - 1 Tenancy Breach Form signed
  - 2 Anti Social Behaviour injunctions obtained
  - 4 Notices of Seeking Possession have been served for Anti-Social Behaviour (2 of these were on Introductory Tenants)
  - 3 Understandings have been signed (1 before a Judge)
  - 1 case has been referred to Mediation
6. There has been increased activity in respect of investigations into complaints of noise nuisance and increased use of noise monitoring equipment. Whilst this has led on occasions to obtaining some good supporting evidence, in most instances it has confirmed that noise levels were not unreasonable and that instead a growing intolerance towards neighbours needs addressing by encouraging both parties to speak to each other and if appropriate offer mediation.
  7. Further, Cabinet on 1 November agreed to use the new powers for demoted tenancies which will provide a further means of tackling anti social behaviour.
  8. It has previously been reported to Council that a restructure was planned to improve responses to Anti Social Behaviour and for the Warden Service with respect to the whole of the Borough. This has now been implemented with the Anti Social Behaviour Manager and two Anti Social Behaviour Officers commencing employment on 7 November 2005. This team will now start to tackle the more serious cases of anti social behaviour throughout the Borough.
  9. The recruitment process is underway to fill vacant Community Warden and Environmental Warden posts, which will complete the restructure. These new teams will work closely with partners.

## **Housing Repairs Service**

10. As part of our continued commitment to improve the services and information we provide to our tenants we have introduced tenant satisfaction surveys for the responsive repairs service. The Tenants Board were instrumental in designing the satisfaction survey which is posted out to tenants as part of the repair receipt. Between the 3 month period of June to August, 5,024 repairs were completed and 496 satisfaction surveys returned. The result showed relatively high levels of customer satisfaction with 94 % of tenants reporting the work as completed on or before the target date, 82% were pleased with the efficiency and service of the tradesperson, whilst 80% were pleased with the helpfulness and efficiency of staff. Further improvements have been identified, particularly in relation to appointments and an IT solution known as Optitime is currently being purchased to deliver an appointments and deployment system which will address these issues.

**Councillor Bill Dixon**  
**Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Community**  
**and Public Protection**