
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

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

Housing Performance 2003/04

1. For the second year running the Housing Service in Darlington has been assessed as being in the top twenty performing authorities nationally for key housing indicators. These include rent collection, void management, the repairs service, management costs, stock condition and benefit administration.

Message in a Bottle

2. The Housing Warden Service has worked jointly with Social Services and other agencies to launch the Message in a Bottle Scheme. This scheme provides emergency services with vital details which are stored in a bottle in the fridge. The scheme has been fully implemented in all of the Council's sheltered housing schemes and users of the Lifeline Warden Service are also encouraged to participate.

Landlord Accreditation Scheme

3. A report to Cabinet on 15 February 2005 outlined the proposed Landlord Accreditation scheme. The post of Landlord Accreditation Officer has now been appointed and the Accreditation Officer will commence her duties next month. Members will recall that Landlord Accreditation schemes are being promoted by the Government as a way of improving relationships with private sector landlords and driving up private sector standards while reducing the need for formal and legal enforcement action. The scheme will publicly identify landlords and their property as being of a recognised higher standard. By implication, the scheme will isolate poor quality landlords offering a poor standard of accommodation and service to tenants, and contributing to anti-social behaviour within the neighbourhood. Clearly, the scheme will take time to develop as landlords volunteer to take part. One of the first duties of the Landlord Accreditation Officer will be to develop partnerships and linkages with landlords and agencies such as the Council, Police and Fire Service. This will ensure that the interests of all parties are best served by the scheme and that it can make a sustainable contribution to the wider priorities of, for example, an improved living environment and community safety. Members will be kept informed of scheme developments over the forthcoming months.

Partnering Charter

4. The Council has joined six other organisations in signing up to a Partnering Charter for new rented bungalows at Edgemoor Road, Firthmoor. The Charter is being seen as a blueprint for future housing developments within the region.
5. The development will be undertaken by Three Rivers Housing Group and will provide 10 two-bedroom bungalows for older tenants. Other partners include the architects, contractors and Firthmoor Community Partnership. The Charter pledges that members will deliver a high quality, value-for-money scheme that will meet local needs, be completed on time and within budget. The local community will be kept informed of progress throughout the project that will be completed before Christmas 2005. An innovative aspect of the new development will be their sustainable use. All the bungalows are of timber construction, south facing to maximise daylight to keep heating costs to a minimum. There will be a specific sun space for each tenant. Furthermore, the dwellings are fully wheelchair accessible and have been designed so that they can be converted to a family house should housing needs change in the future. The development will further contribute to the on-going regeneration of Firthmoor.

Anti Social Behaviour/Warden Service

6. The management structure of the Warden Service has been reviewed in light of a number of vacancies. A new post of Anti Social Behaviour Manager will have responsibility for managing the Warden Service and anti social behaviour.
7. Two dedicated Anti Social Behaviour Officers will also be employed to work closely with partner agencies and the community to resolve incidents of youths causing annoyance, anti social behaviour and neighbourhood disputes. These officers will deal with the above on a case-by-case basis across all tenures.
8. An Environmental Crime Enforcement Section will be established within the Uniformed Warden Team to deal specifically with education and enforcement for litter, fly tipping, graffiti, fly posting, dog fouling, vehicles and waste utilising existing powers and new powers as part of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. This will concentrate deployment of specific wardens on these areas of work to improve effectiveness rather than all wardens undertaking these functions.
9. The changes above are all contained within existing financial resources and recruitment to the new posts is currently underway. Once in place, this new team, working closely with partners, will provide more effective resources to address issues relating to anti social behaviour and youths causing annoyance.

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