
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

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

Benefit Take Up Campaign

2. It is recognised that millions of pounds of benefit go unclaimed each year by some of the most vulnerable people in society and earlier this year, the Housing Benefits Section undertook a campaign for the take-up of Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits. Over 12,000 letters were sent out to residents informing them of the benefits available. In addition, a visiting service was made available for residents who wanted more information or help with claiming. The objective was to achieve an additional £50,000 of benefits take up as a result of the campaign.
3. I am pleased to report that the campaign has been an overwhelming success. Over 900 residents made contact to enquire about Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits. As a result of the help and advice given, 77 vulnerable and low-income households were able to claim additional benefits, discounts and Tax Credits they were entitled to, amounting to a total of £71,448. These included 3 pensioners who each saw their annual income increase by over £4,000 as a result of the campaign,
4. The Housing Benefits Section is now working closely with the new Welfare Rights Unit to continue to publicise the availability of help.

Tenants Governance

5. The new governance arrangements for Council tenants are now well advanced with a well established Housing Executive Committee, Tenants Board and various Task and Finish Groups covering areas such as Sheltered Housing, the Housing Options Service, Leaseholders and Repairs and Maintenance. Members of the Tenant's Board are mid-way through a robust training programme and have already completed their vision and objectives for tenant involvement, which will be incorporated to the Housing Service Planning process. I have ensured that they play an integral part in the procurement arrangements for the Repairs and Maintenance Service and ultimately in the appointment of any successful contractors.

Remodelling Blocks of Flats

6. Council flats built in the mid-1960's and early 1970's no longer meet the expectations of current and future tenants. An extensive programme of remodelling and refurbishment is now successfully underway as part of the Housing Business Plan. Three blocks of flats at Dinsdale Crescent will be completed during the current financial year and feedback from tenants who have already moved back into their new flats is extremely positive. Other blocks at Sherbourne House, Branksome and Mount Pleasant House, Coniscliffe Road, where bedsits are being converted to flats, will also be completed this year.
7. To mark the completion of the work to Ramsgill House, which is the first block of flats at Lascelles Park to be improved, an Open Day was held on 31st August 2005. Tenants, Members and Officers were invited to attend and feedback any comments they may have.

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