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**OVERVIEW OF HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

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

**Housing Investment Programme 2004/05**

2. Cabinet recently approved the Capital Programme for Housing 2004/05. The total programme amounts to £6,109m and includes:
- (a) New kitchens, bathrooms and rewiring in 132 homes.
  - (b) New gas central heating in 243 homes.
  - (c) Extensive internal and external improvements in two blocks of 18 flats.
  - (d) Improved door entry systems to maximise security in 62 flats.
  - (e) Improved energy efficiency in 311 homes.
  - (f) Remodelling and upgrading a sheltered housing scheme to 'Extra Care' standards.
  - (g) Environment improvements to 83 homes.
  - (h) Investment of £1.341m to improve standards in private sector homes including £270,000 for adaptations to support people to live independently in the community.

**Housing Corporation Funding 2004/05**

3. Three Housing Associations have successfully attracted around £2.4m of grants from the Housing Corporation to help meet identified housing needs in Darlington in 2004/05. These include:-
- (a) Home Housing Group to provide 11 flats for Homeless persons.
  - (b) Three Rivers Housing Group to provide 10, two bedroomed flats for rent and ten family homes for shared ownership to help address issues of affordable housing at Firthmoor.
  - (c) Endeavour Housing Association to provide six flats for rent by working with private sector landlords or owners to convert space above shops around the North Road Corridor.

The total investment involved is £3.6m.

## **Stock Option Appraisal**

4. Now that the consultation phase of the Stock Option Appraisal process has come to an end, I am pleased to report on the extensive range of consultation, which has taken place with stakeholders, particularly tenants. Stakeholders were first consulted during the initial stages of the project and their views fed into the analysis. They were then consulted again as messages about how the options might work in Darlington emerged. Darlington has recently been cited by GONE as a good practice example in respect of consultation. Consultations have included:-

- (a) Consultative briefings for staff.
- (b) Consultative briefings with the Residents Panel.
- (c) Consultative briefings for elected Members.
- (d) Newsletters delivered to all Council homes and waiting list applicants.
- (e) Two rounds of local meetings in Autumn 2003 and February 2004.
- (f) Questionnaires to tenants.
- (g) Focus Groups.
- (h) Work carried out by PEP, the Independent Tenant Adviser consultancy.
- (i) An end of consultation conference 'Shaping the Proposals'.

The outcome of this consultation, together with the financial and technical appraisals, are currently being evaluated.

## **Homelessness Performance**

5. Despite continuing significant increases in homelessness cases the Housing Service has continued to process applications within the top quartile of national performance with 99% of homeless investigations being undertaken in the Government deadline of 33 days and the current average in Darlington now standing at 9 days. The number of homelessness investigations has increased from 591 in 2001/02 to 766 in 2002/03 to 913 in 2003/04. The three key reasons for people declaring themselves homeless are because they are asked to leave by family or friends, relationship breakdowns and the loss of rented property. The sharp increase reflects the current shortage of rented houses in the social housing sector, which puts added strain on relationships whilst applicants are waiting for rehousing. Out of 769 relets last year 162 (21%) were to homeless households.

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