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**OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND ENGAGEMENT PORTFOLIO**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work under my Communities and Engagement Portfolio:

**Taking forward the Third Sector Strategy**

2. Following liaison with the CVS I have written a joint letter with the Chair of the CVS to voluntary organisations in Darlington informing them of both organisations' intentions to work more closely to deliver the third sector strategy.

**Community Engagement Highlights**

3. Two high profile Community Engagement Initiatives have been implemented the Mayoral Referendum and the Sustainable Community Strategy.

**(a) Mayoral Referendum**

- (i) Awareness of the Mayoral Referendum has been undertaken in two phases. The first phase comprised consultation on which mayoral options i.e. Leader and Cabinet or Council Manager and Cabinet took place from 21st May 2007 to Friday 15th June 2007. 909 responses were received in response to both quantitative and qualitative consultation.
- (ii) The second phase 'Information Awareness Raising' took place from 26th July to 29th August and consisted of the organisation and facilitation of 25 road show/ meetings in various locations throughout the town.

**(b) Sustainable Community Strategy**

- (i) To help inform the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy, the first phase consultation to identify issues for improvement took place from 19th July to the 14th September 2007. Forty events have taken place in various locations throughout the town including the organisation of a Sustainable Community Strategy conference at Darlington Football club where over 100 delegates from the private, business and voluntary and community sector attended. Nearly 1000 people have been engaged in the first phase consultation with 857 residents taking the time to complete priority postcards. Analysis has shown that feedback has been received from every ward in Darlington.

- (ii) The second stage consultation is to run from the 29th of September 2007 to the 26th October 2007. This stage is commencing with a public prioritisation event to be held in the Dolphin Centre commencing at 10.30am.

### **LSP Enquiry Group 6**

4. The focus of Enquiry Group 6 was to address the following question.

*‘ Maximising life chances and choices throughout Darlington ensuring continuous improvement for priority people and places through a joined-up approach ’.*

5. In total the group had six meetings. To inform discussion and debate the group heard presentations from Dr Bert Provan, Deputy Director, Department for Communities and Local Government who gave a national perspective in relation to the question, four local authorities (two of which were Beacon councils for ‘ Getting Closer to Communities’) and Five Lamps a voluntary and Community Sector organisation. The group concluded its work on the 4th of September and submitted its recommendations to the LSP on the 7th of September 2007.

### **Talking Together**

6. Talking Together is the initiation of an ongoing process of informal area-based engagement. It is proposed to hold ‘Talking Together’ drop in sessions in each of the five Street Scene areas each quarter (total of 20 drop in sessions per year). The first sessions to commence the back end of October 2007 with subsequent meetings to be held in January 2008, April 2008 and July 2008. The first one and half hours of the session to be devoted to the drop in part of the event with core area based services such as Street Scene, Community Safety, Youth Service and Children’s Services Locality Development Managers in attendance. The last hour of the meeting would be devoted to a chaired ‘Question Time’ session. The panel, to be chaired by a member of Cabinet, and made up of ward councillors and either a Director or an Assistant Director.

### **Community Partnerships**

7. The Community Partnerships working with partners have an annual target for 2007/2008 to attract £450,000 of external funding into the priority areas for the delivery of local projects. To date £208,500 has been secured. Funding has been obtained from Fair Share funding, County Durham Foundations, Children’s Fund, Historic Churches Trust, Cummins, TV delegated grants, Royal Victoria Trust. North Road Community Partnership and Friends of the Park are still awaiting the outcome of a further £200,000 funding for the North Lodge Band Stand (Heritage Lottery & Northern Rock ) a decision is expected October 2007.

### **Welfare Rights**

8. The Welfare Rights team are a small team comprising the Welfare Rights Manager and Welfare Rights Officer. Funding secured from Housing has led to the appointment of an additional Welfare Rights Officer whose date of appointment is still to be confirmed. The unit has an annual target of £780,000 to increase benefit take up. To date performance is at £269,771. The unit got off to a slow start only increasing take up by £120,949 for the first

quarter, however take up for July and August amounted to £148,822 and the unit are confident that the annual target will be achieved.

## **Meetings**

9. I have attended the following meetings:

9th August - Meeting with Chair and CEO CVS to discuss future relationship

3rd Sep - met volunteers and workers from WEA to discuss accommodation

6th Sep - attended Hurworth Community Partnership

10th Sep - meeting with Chair and CEO CAB

11th Sep - Met Chair and CEO Age Concern

14th Sep - meeting with CEO 700 Club

19th Sep - attended Northgate Community Partnership

**Councillor Jenny Chapman**  
**Cabinet Member with Communities and Engagement Portfolio**