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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:-

**New Housing Schemes**

2. The Housing Corporation have recently announced funding for two new housing schemes:

Welbeck Avenue, Haughton - In response to the particularly high need for larger family houses, Endeavor Housing Association are providing seven houses one of which will be purpose built for a family with a child with disabilities. The site currently comprises of an area of wasteland and an ageing garage block, which has outlived its useful life and is in poor condition. The development will therefore greatly enhance the appearance of the area.

Rosemary Court - Hanover Housing Association are to provide 8 two bedroomed bungalows for shared ownership at the rear of Rosemary Court on Lascelles Park. These will complement the ongoing works to remodel the existing Council owned sheltered housing scheme at Rosemary Court into an Extra Care Scheme and new build facilities provided by Hanover Housing Association, which include 14 Extra Care flats for older people with dementia, and a range of high quality community facilities. To minimise disruption to local residents work on both projects will take place over the next 18 months. Shared ownerships schemes are available in various locations throughout Darlington such as Moorfields, the Brinkburn area and Parkside. They are a great opportunity for people on a limited income who want some equity in their home. The scheme at Rosemary Court will be for older people and will be on the basis of 25% to rent and 75% to buy.

**Repairs and Maintenance Marketing Day**

3. A very successful Marketing Day was held on 10 May to engage with potential partners that are interested in helping the authority shape our Housing Repairs and Maintenance service over the next 5 years. Around 50 organisations attended the day from a wide range of services including construction, civil engineering, roofing, heating, electrical rewiring, window and door replacements, environmental works and decoration. Companies large and small, local and national attended and indicated they were interested in working with us. The outcomes from the day are still to be evaluated but during the year we intend to establish new partnerships to enable us to continually improve the Repairs and Maintenance Service whilst also identifying cost efficiencies.

## **The Tenants Board**

4. Over the last few months the Tenant's Board have been extremely busy, elections have been held and new appointments made. Harry Abbott is the new Chair, Richard Westmoreland the Vice Chair and Bal Shukla the Treasurer. My thanks are extended to Michael Nicholson, Terry Taylor and Jacqueline Sawyer, the previous holders of these positions who were pivotal in helping to establish the Board following the Stock Option Appraisal and who remain on the Board to provide support.
5. The Tenants Board have been involved in the formulation of the Housing Service Plan and in agreeing targets as well as developing their own work programme for 2006-7. They have also had the opportunity to input into other related plans such as the Building Services Service Plan and write regular articles for the tenants' Newsletter, Hot News.
6. Each quarter the Board receives and comments on the Housing Management Performance report. Tenants have visited the Contact Centre and met with the Officers delivering this service. An Officer from the Street Scene Leading Edge project has attended the Tenants Board and discussed how the new service can best be delivered to meet their needs. They were keen to know how the service could link to the regular programme of estate inspections and asked for a best-kept area award to be considered.
7. They have considered a number of reports on the Review of Housing Repairs and Maintenance and input into changes to be introduced shortly, such as, the use of Locator Plus, a diagnostic tool for helping tenants identify what repairs are required, Opti time, an appointment and deployment system and new software which measures Key Performance Indicators. The Board have received training in partnering and contractor selection and have attended the Marketing Day at the Darlington Football ground on the 10th May.
8. They have also been consulted on specifications for major work such as internal planned maintenance and remodelling works and are now starting to get involved in the selection of products such as the type of heating controls.

## **Housing Management Performance**

9. The Housing Quality Network recent assessment of performance of local authority Housing Services stated that Darlington is placed within the top 34 in England.
10. Based on housing management performance for 2004/2005, top performers are identified in relation to the average time it takes the authority to re-let a property – in Darlington in 2004/05 the average time this took was 31 days – compared with an average of 34.8 days in the top performers category.
11. The percentage of urgent property repairs completed on time in Darlington is 95.5 per cent, compared with 97.1 per cent for other top performers, and the amount of rent collected is 99.5 per cent in Darlington, compared with a 98.1 per cent average among the top performers.

## **Housing Benefit Performance**

12. A recent report published by the Department for Work and Pensions show that the Housing Benefits service is amongst the best in the country. Every 3 months, the Government produces a report comparing every Council's performance over 6 different measures of how well claims for Housing Benefit are processed. These performance figures cover such things as how quickly and accurately new claims for benefit are processed and paid.
13. The latest figures for October to December 2005 show that for the first time, Darlington's Housing Benefits service is out performing the best in all 6 measures, with performance comfortably within the top 25% nationally.

### **1-7 Swale Grove, off Ribble Drive**

14. On 22 May, Endeavour Housing Association officially opened a new scheme of seven 2-bed bungalows on Swale Grove, off Ribble Drive. The scheme represents £750,000 of investment in new affordable housing for Darlington, partly funded by a Housing Corporation Grant of just under £495,000. The new accommodation provides larger older person accommodation, helping to address the needs identified in the recent Local Housing Assessment, and as the homes are built to the 'lifetime' homes standard, they are both adaptable for other needs groups and are disabled access friendly. Tenants for these homes have been identified from the Council's Waiting List for accommodation.

## **LAA – Community Safety**

15. The implementation of Darlington's first Local Area Agreement (LAA) brings with it new challenges and opportunities for the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the other Thematic Partnerships of Darlington Partnership. The LAA draws together a number of key funding streams including the SSCF that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership receives from the Home Office.
16. The Safety Stronger Communities outcomes of the LAA are:
  - (a) To reduce crime, the harm caused by illegal drugs, and to reassure the public, reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.
  - (b) To empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and the delivery of services.
  - (c) To have cleaner, greener and safer public places.
  - (d) To improve the quality of life for people in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and ensure service providers are more responsible to neighbourhood needs and improve their delivery.
  - (e) To increase numbers of children and young people who are positively engaged in their free time – achieving personal and social development.

17. There are 5 main actions in our LAA to enable us to deliver the outcomes for Safer and Stronger Communities:
- (a) The development of an intelligence led approach to crime and anti-social behaviour. Including the appointment of a partnership analyst and the development of GIS which will allow for the partnership to adopt a multi agency intelligence led approach and response to crime and anti social behaviour. The GIS will allow for real time case handling and ensure PCSO's, wardens, Street Scene staff are deployed in hot spot areas. The analyst will feed the area-based teams the information they require to respond appropriately and support area problem solving.
  - (b) Enhancing our response to anti-social behaviour and crime through improving visibility with the appointment of additional Police Community Support Officers and the mainstreaming on a number of local authority Uniformed Wardens.
  - (c) The Partnership is aware of a number of service gaps in respect of Domestic Violence and the ability to respond quickly to emerging crime "hot spot" areas through tailored campaigns e.g. target hardening for burglary. The LAA will plug these.
  - (d) Consultation and engagement of children and young people through the restructured youth service will increase the uptake of sport and recreation through a range of projects including developing sustainable approaches to the way in which such services for children and young people are delivered. We will build upon the success of the Westside Project by making a sustainable resource available to respond to community consultation priorities. It is envisaged that this will focus primarily on the most deprived wards.
  - (e) Increasing community capacity through volunteering. We will develop a framework for identifying and developing volunteering 'vacancies' and a 'recruitment' mechanism to match volunteers to these opportunities. The potential and range of activities is unlimited from friends of parks to school governors. A key part of this scheme would be the active participation of major employers in the town – across all sectors. The scheme will target the use of volunteers in those areas that are particularly disadvantaged and lack therefore capacity to support young people and families.

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