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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. Together with the chair of the CVS I launched the Third Sector Strategy on 13 November 2007. I also took part in the recruitment panel for Executive Director of the CVS and congratulate Karen Grundy, the acting Chief Officer of CVS on her appointment. I look forward to continuing to work with the CVS on delivering the Third Sector Strategy. The Council's recently appointed Voluntary Sector Liaison Manager, Mary Hall takes up her post on 10 December.

### **Community Engagement Highlights**

3. Building on the extensive consultation carried out on first stage of the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy, which engaged approximately 1000 people, innovative prioritisation events were carried out with key stakeholders, including Darlington Assembly the Citizens Panel, Darlington Association on Disability, the Interfaith Group and those residents who in the first stage of consultation expressed the desire to be further engaged. The results of this prioritisation are being fed into the drafting of the new strategy.
4. An implementation plan has been agreed by Cabinet to deliver all the recommendations of the July report on improving community engagement. This includes the development of Talking Together.

### **LINKs**

5. A way forward has been agreed to develop Darlington's Local Involvement Network. A consultation event was held on 13 November which was well attended and several volunteers have agreed to work with us on developing the Network by the statutory deadline.

### **Talking Together**

6. The first round of Talking Together took place over two weeks at the end of October/early November in all five street scene areas. 196 members of the public attended accompanied by 250 children. The events were well supported by our partners in the Police, Fire Service and the PCT, in addition to officers and ward members. Information is currently being prepared on the issues and questions raised by the public for publication in the Town Crier.

The views of attendees are currently being sought to further improve Talking Together as a result of learning from the pilot. The next round of Talking Together will include consultation on the Medium Term Financial Plan and Corporate Plan.

### **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. Welfare Rights is 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 meetings of Northgate and North Road Community Partnerships to introduce myself to members and discuss progress against Action Plans.

I was the keynote speaker at the AGM of the 700 Club.

I have attended four of the five Talking Together events to gain first hand feedback from residents and colleagues.

Regular meetings have taken place with the Chair and Chief Officer at CVS, representatives of the Chairs and Chief Officers' forum to monitor progress on the Third Sector Strategy and discuss relevant issues.

I attended the LSP board meeting.

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