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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:

### **Community Engagement Highlights**

2. Darlington Partnership, the borough's local strategic partnership, on 5 March agreed the borough's new sustainable community strategy, One Darlington – Perfectly Placed. This was the culmination of a lengthy process that combined the results of enquiry groups led by partners, with extensive community engagement. The process was developed to incorporate detailed consultation on the draft strategy produced at the end of November. The final version was welcomed by partners who also praised the engagement process. The document's strength is the fact that it has been clearly shaped by all sectors in Darlington including partners, members of the public, councillors and staff.
3. Several high-profile changes to the Council's proposed budget were made this year, partly as a result of engagement activity supported by Connecting with Communities. This included discussion at Talking Together events, face-to-face awareness-raising work with members of the public in the Cornmill Centre and a focused event with members of the voluntary and community sectors.

### **Talking Together**

4. Work is well advanced on preparing for the third round of Talking Together events. I am pleased that work is underway to address the issues arising from the second round including traffic calming at Middleton St George.

### **Welfare Rights**

5. The reach of Welfare Rights has been extended in January and March with two advice surgeries at Middleton St George Hospital, which treats people with serious mental ill health. During January 08, a total of £77,547 in additional benefits was secured for clients. The team is predicted to meet its annual target for benefit take-up.

### **Equalities Training**

6. Four bespoke modules of pilot equalities training have been delivered along with "introduction to disability equality impact assessment" training for Children's Services. The former were delivered after a long gestation that enabled the Council's Social Inclusion Implementation Group to take full account of fast-moving changes in the equalities policy

landscape.

### **Website**

7. Front page Connecting with Communities content has been secured for the Council website, which has now been live for around five weeks. Further training will be rolled out to ensure that web functionality on these pages is being fully exploited.

### **Complaints Management**

8. Recruitment is now underway to the post of complaints manager which is key to the authority significantly improving its handling of complaints and therefore customer services.

### **Customer Charter**

9. A customer charter has been considered by Cabinet which is another strand of our work to improve customer services.

### **Meetings**

I have attended meetings of Darlington Town Twinning Association, West End Partnership, Darlington Assembly and the Corporate Governance Working Group.

I gave a presentation to community representatives from Bank Top, Lascelles, Lingfield and Eastbourne wards about the future of Community Partnerships in Darlington and heard from residents about their hopes for the future.

I have also held meetings with volunteers from Darlington Media Workshop, Community Workers at St Andrews Church and young people hoping to be elected as Darlington's Member of Youth Parliament. I attended a showing of a DVD created to showcase the RAID trip to Lesotho and the Best of Darlington Awards.

I attempted to scale a temporary climbing wall in the market square for International Women's Day.

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