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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Jenny Chapman, Communities and Engagement Portfolio**  
**Responsible Director – Lorraine O’Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To present the implementation plan and financial implications for the implementation of the community engagement proposals agreed at Council on the 19th July 2007. The implementation plan is attached at Appendix 1.

**Information and Analysis**

2. On the 19th of July 2007 Council agreed a number of proposals to foster closer working relationships with residents and the LSP, which would also modernise communications and create new opportunities for the public to interact with the Council.
3. An implementation plan for taking forward the proposals is attached at **Appendix 1**. A summary of how each action is being taken forward is outlined below.

**Closer working Relationships**

4. Council agreed that the following initiatives be implemented to ensure closer working relationships are fostered.

- (a) Cabinet meet with LSP theme group chairs twice a year to review progress in delivering the Community Strategy and to consult on emerging Council policy.**

It is intended to hold joint meetings with LSP chairs and Cabinet in November 2007 and January 2008. The focus of the meetings will be to examine the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy. In addition Democratic Services are to arrange one to one meetings with the relevant Cabinet holder and LSP chair in order to develop a rapport and relationship between the respective individuals

- (b) Holding a conference once a year to consult with the public, stakeholders and partners on the draft corporate plan and MTFP.**

The ideal time to hold a half-day annual conference would be February 2008. This will enable it to be informed by the processes already taking place to develop the Sustainable Community Strategy and departmental service planning. These will be sufficiently developed by February to enable the priorities identified via consultation with residents and staff to ensure the programme is reflective of the identification of current issues.

**(c) Making more consistent use of the various bodies such as GOLD, the Youth Parliament etc. To consult different sections of the community on emerging Council policy.**

These bodies are already used extensively for consultation on matters such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Mayoral Referendum. To ensure more consistent use of such bodies, a toolkit will be developed for use by staff. This will include details not only of the regularly used organisations but also other bodies and the means to access other sections of the community, such as rarely heard groups, for engagement purposes. Website proposals outlined below in terms of a community engagement diary will also be of assistance to staff.

**(d) Recognising that it is vital to ensure that this work builds on and improves our work to involve minority communities and takes forward the youth engagement strategy.**

The Policy Advisor for Social Inclusion will be leading this work. A joint review of both the Community Engagement and Youth Strategy will commence in February 2008 concluding June 2008 to identify shared actions. The review will also include a review of the race equality infrastructure and provision in Darlington in context of regional changes and the re establishment of CRE and to embed principles of Hear by Right into the work of the Council.

**(e) To increase awareness and engagement in the democratic process.**

Democratic Services are taking forward the proposals outlined below. In addition they are holding a number of events working with the Youth Service to coincide with Local Democracy week, 15th October to 21st October 2007. A number of road show events have also been programmed in for the 11th and 23rd of October 2007. To further broaden awareness Democratic Services are linking into the 'Talking Together' drop in sessions and will be present at all 20 events held throughout the year commencing 27th October 2007.

***i) Holding a quarterly 'How your Council Works for you' event***

The Support Manager has advised that due to summer and Christmas recess periods and the timing of Local Democracy Week (LDW) it will only be possible to hold three events in the first year. The first event (to co-incide LDW) on 'How your Council Works for You' is to be held on the 17th October 2007 with subsequent sessions being held in February 2008 and July 2008.

***ii) 'Mayor for the Day' competition for schools***

This is a current initiative (Junior Mayor and Mayoress for the Day) which, traditionally has had low take up from schools engaging in the competition. Democratic Services are to implement a publicity campaign for the competition in early March 2008, with entries being judged late March early April and the winners being invited to take up the mayoral positions for the day in April/May. Early awareness raising will be undertaken during Local Democracy week.

**iii) Hosting School Council meetings in the Town Hall**

This is an ongoing initiative, which is to be further promoted as part of the programme of events during Local Democracy week. Following on from this, schools will be contacted in early November 2007 and a timetable for hosting meetings established once take up is known.

**iv) Council Question Time**

Promotions to encourage the public to attend Council and ask questions will take place through promotional campaigns for ‘ How Your Council Works for You’ and at ‘Talking Together’ sessions.

**v) Cabinet in the Community meetings (neighbourhood venues).**

It is suggested that Cabinet in the Community Meetings coincide with appropriate ‘ Talking Together’ sessions. The first Cabinet in the Community meeting taking place on the 15th of January 2007 followed by 29th April 2008. Dates for July and October 2008 will be diaried in when 2008/09 meeting dates are available.

## **Modernising Communications**

5. Council agreed that the following proposals be developed to ensure communications are modernised.

**(a) Updating and revising the website to make it more user friendly and more engaging with opportunities for resident consultation and engagement. Ensuring that revised communications encapsulates channels such as texting.**

A project is to be implemented to develop community engagement capability and tools for the Council’s website over the next 3-6 months. Phase 1 will be implemented over the next 2-3 months ( by January 2008) and will include the design and development of a community engagement area for the site including a page for voluntary and community sector engagement. The development will need to include a set of tools to encourage online community engagement and participation including a consultation diary with the capability for visitors to search for consultation events by date and by subject area.

In phase 1, visitors will be able to sign up to receive email notification of community engagement events taking place based on date ranges or on subject areas e.g. consultation with special interest groups, older people, youth matters, transport etc. As part of the sign-up mechanism, we will gather mobile telephone data in preparation for Phase 2. There will also be the ability to be able to conduct consultation online e.g. via emails, ‘blogs’ and discussion forums and the capability to publish results of polls and surveys etc. via the web.

Phase 2, will be implemented within 3-6 months and focus on providing text messaging capability, allowing visitors to sign up via the new website to receive text message alerts regarding events they’ve expressed an interest in, again via date and or subject area.

- b) Giving greater prominence to the existing right of the public to ask questions of a Cabinet member at Council, and developing opportunities to extend this involvement into Cabinet Meetings.**

This proposal is linked into the initiatives covered earlier i.e. ‘ How Your Council Works for You’, ‘ Talking Together Cabinet in the Community’.

- c) Reviewing and revamping Town Crier to ensure that it offers more opportunities for public involvement, for news on local communities and community groups, and for information on the outcomes and action taken following consultation;**

Initially proposals from Communications are being implemented involving a dedicated page in each issue of the Town Crier for the Connecting with Communities team to use. This will promote forthcoming community engagement events; provide feedback from previous engagement and general news coming out from communities through our engagement processes. A further paper will be presented outlining proposals on a total revamp of the Town Crier ensuring that it is more resident and local community focused.

- d) Establishing the’ Talking Together’ roadshows, to be held quarterly at a different venue in the Streetscene areas, with widespread involvement from Members, Council and other public services as a key vehicle to engage with the public at the area level.**

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 drop in sessions will commence in October/November 2007. Subsequent meetings would be held in January 2008, April 2008 and July 2008 with one meeting-taking place in each week of the designated months. A flexible approach will be taken to when these meetings are held i.e. to hold some meetings on an evening lasting no more than two and half hours other meetings to be held on a Saturday.

For the first hour and a half a typical drop in will involve core area based services engaging with residents such as Street Scene, Community Safety, Youth Service , Children’s Services and Locality Development Managers working to a detailed brief provided by Connecting with Communities. The various services will each have their own exhibition area and will actively seek to engage with residents both on current services and service developments.

For example, Connecting with Communities will use the sessions to develop the Council’s Customer Charter and will be asking residents what their key ingredients are for good customer care. For Streetscene, current service to the localities will be evident and residents will have opportunities to identify hot spot areas on localised maps and to indicate their priorities for service improvement. For Anti Social Behaviour and the Police, the interactive technology will be utilised for a quiz ( locally based ) to gain perceptions on crime and then compare this to actual crime data. Information gathered will also inform service development. In addition partners such as the Police and the PCT will be in attendance. The PCT will use the sessions for the provision of health checks and for the promotion of healthy lifestyle activities.

The last hour of the meeting will be devoted to a chaired ‘Question Time’ session. All ward members will be invited to ‘Talking Together’. Talking Together briefing sessions for members have been arranged for the 23rd of October 2007 to last one hour, session one to commence at 3.30pm, session two at 5.30pm. The public will have the opportunity to question a panel made up of elected members with a member of Cabinet chairing the event supported by a member of CMT. The dates for the first round of Talking Together have been arranged and are as follows:

**Table 1: Talking Together Dates**

<b>Street Scene Area</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Venue</b>
<b>North West</b> covering the wards of Pierremont, Cockerton East and West, Faverdale, Heighington and Coniscliffe	Saturday 27th October 2007	1pm to 3.30pm	Willow Road Community Centre
<b>South West</b> covering the wards of College, Hummersknott, Mowden, Park West and East and Hurworth.	Wednesday 31st October 2007	6pm to 8.30pm	Hurworth Primary School, Roundhill Building
<b>North East</b> covering the wards of Haughton East West and North parts of Whessoe and Sadberge.	Saturday 3rd November 2007	10am to 12.30pm	Haughton Education Village
<b>Central</b> covering the wards of Central, Northgate, North Road, Harrowgate Hill, part of Whessoe and Sadberge.	Wednesday 7th November 2007	6pm to 8.30pm	Northlands Methodist Church Hall North Road
<b>South East</b> covering the wards of Bank Top, Lascelles, Lingfield, Eastbourne and Middleton St George.	Saturday 10th November 2007	10am to 12.30pm	Dodmire Junior School, Rydal Rd

Individual resident issues will be captured using an ‘issues log sheet’ (in triplicate). The top copy to be given to the individual as a receipt for issues raised. The second copy to be kept by the service department to action and confirm in writing to the individual what action has been taken. The third copy to be kept by Connecting with Communities who will keep a central monitoring log to ensure issues have been actioned. Higher level issues will be analysed and summarised by the Connecting with Communities Team to pull out themes which could inform service improvement and strategic developments.

The information captured from each session will be incorporated in a feedback information leaflet in the style ‘You Said We Did’ displayed on the Council website and included with invitations for those people who attended the event to come along to the next event. It is the intention to build up a database of people who have signed up to the ‘Talking Together’ events. The leaflet would also be given out at the next meeting. Feedback using the ‘You Said We Did’ summary could be the introduction to the Question and Answer session. It is also proposed that once per year the leaflet is sent out to every household in Darlington not only to promote the programme for ‘Talking Together’ but also to raise awareness and provide feedback on action taken in response to issues raised by the community.

Talking Together provides the building blocks to develop if appropriate the vehicle for engaging with the public in participatory budgeting to influence spending priorities and make decisions on service improvements and policy development.

To capture the public's interest the drop in sessions need to be interesting and informative. Family fun entertainment has been arranged. The October activities are themed around Halloween for the 3rd, and 7th of November Guy Fawkes and for the 10th November Getting ready for Santa. In addition arts and craft stalls have been invited to attend. The family fun entertainment serves two purposes, the first being to make it more appealing for residents to come along the second being those with children will be able to engage in 'business activity' whilst their children are occupied.

To further strengthen 'Talking Together' it is proposed that staff (subject to staffing resources see below) within the Connecting with Communities Team have a monthly spot on the market which provides the opportunity for a wide range of residents from all areas of the Borough to raise issues of concern. Staff would log issues and ensure that these were dealt with providing feedback to issues raised. This approach is a highly visible approach to demonstrate that we are a 'listening' council.

**e) Ensuring that the opportunity is taken to improve information flows between officers and ward members.**

To develop this opportunity, prior to each phase of 'Talking Together' members will be invited to a briefing session in advance of events taking place. The first briefing sessions for Talking Together are to take place on the 23rd October 2007. At these briefings Members will be talked through the events so they have a clear understanding how they will work. In addition 'Talking Together You Said We Did' feedback information leaflets will be circulated to members in advance of wider circulation to the public.

**Review of the way the Council works**

It was proposed that a 'task and finish' review of governance arrangements for the Council be undertaken. A review group met on the 3rd of September 2007 and terms of reference for the group are in development. The review is to take place between October 2007 and December 2007 with a report being submitted to Cabinet on the 18th of January 2008 and Council on the 31st January 2008.

**Financial Implications**

6. The report to Council outlined that for the Council to implement its new approach to community engagement and promote more democratic involvement the costs may be in the region of £100,000 pa. However, after considering the proposals further there are implications for both staffing and promotional/ implementation costs. The total cost is therefore, more in the region of £144,500, with dedicated staffing costs at £62,000 and £83,500 for promotional/implementation costs and the delivery of 'Talking Together'. The Implementation Plan at Appendix 1 provides a full breakdown of costs.

## **Staffing Resources**

7. The report presented to Council outlined that a focus for driving forward Community Engagement is being given with the establishment of a Connecting with Communities unit drawing together staff within the Council in order to give a clearer direction to customer services and engagement.
8. This is a new area of work and over the summer months resources have had to be deployed from Community Services and the Assistant Chief Executive in advance of Connecting with Communities being established, which has had an impact on activities within these departments. This has involved senior staff having to undertake both their substantive post duties while being heavily engaged in the co-ordination and implementation of two high profile campaigns - 'Mayoral Referendum' and the Sustainable Community Strategy in addition to preparing for the implementation of 'Talking Together'. These staff have been stretched to capacity and it is evident that for the unit to have a fighting chance of success in delivering on the Council's Community Engagement agenda we need to ensure that it has the right amount of dedicated officer time within it. There has also been a corresponding impact on their own normal areas of work.
9. To this end it is proposed that two new posts are required. A Community Engagement Facilitator( Scale O) and Community Engagement Assistant ( Scale K). The annual revenue costs for these two-posts amount to £62,000 (including on costs and increments).
10. The Community Engagement Facilitators main role would be as 'events' organiser, programming and planning the implementation of 'Talking Together', strategic consultation engagement initiatives including conferences and workshops sessions etc. Analysis of customer data in various formats, identifying gaps for improvement to develop causal links between the outcomes of engagement activity and the Council's Business Planning process.
11. The Community Engagement Assistant would provide assistance to the Community Engagement Facilitator with events organisation, publicity and promotional campaigns and ensuring website information was current and relevant. These new posts will also provide the capacity to resource the continued development of community engagement in line with Government thinking i.e. neighbourhood charters, participatory budgeting and provides the capacity to staff a regular stall monthly market stall in the town centre etc.
12. In addition to the proposals agreed at Council a Business Engagement Strategy is being developed which will outline how we can engage with the business sector more effectively.

## **Promotional and Implementation Costs.**

13. The main costs for promotional and implementation activity can be categorised into three main areas - Democratic Services, website development and Town Crier, and Talking Together.
14. Democratic Services have estimated that to take forward their proposals 'How your Council Works for You, Mayor for the Day, hosting school council meetings, Cabinet in the Community and the review of the Council's governance arrangements, would incur costs in the region of £9,500. This would fund the revamping of democratic literature, promotion of and costs of engagement activity and expenses incurred for the 'task and finish' review of

governance arrangements for the Council.

15. It is estimated that to develop the website as outlined earlier to cover development and web design, costs would be in the region of £12,000. A further £12,000 secures a monthly-dedicated page in the Town Crier.
16. After staffing costs the second significant costing is in relation to the implementation of Talking Together. Outlined in the Table overleaf are annual costings for ‘ Talking Together’ covering the following:

### ***Publicity***

Four full page articles will be taken out in the Town Crier four times per year to advertise the dates of the drop in sessions and provide feedback on the previous events. Two to three weeks prior to each event a flyer will be distributed to children and young people attending Secondary, Primary and nursery schools to give to parents and carers.

Specific invitations will also be sent out to people registered on our consultative databases. Articles will also be placed in Community Partnership newsletters and ward councillors will be requested to promote the event through their ward newsletters.

### ***Venue Hire and Market Stalls***

It is the intention that during the winter, autumn and spring months Talking Together will be located inside. However, in the summer months it is proposed that ‘Talking Together’ will be located in a park or on green space in each of the five Street Scene areas. The costs for events in the park allow for hiring, erecting and dismantling of Darlington Borough Council market stalls and hiring of a generator for an electricity supply.

### ***Feedback Leaflets***

Feedback leaflets will be sent to people who have attended events and included with invitations to forthcoming events. It is the intention to send a copy of this leaflet to every household in Darlington providing feedback on changes that have been implemented in response to issues raised and promoting the future programme of events once a year.

### ***Family Fun Activities***

Family fun entertainment will be arranged to serve two purposes. Firstly, to make it more appealing for residents to come along and secondly, so that those with children will be able to engage in ‘business activity’ whilst their children are occupied. Examples of activities include, balloon making, face painting, etc. A cost has also been included for the provision of Crèche facilities.

### ***Staffing Costs***

It is estimated that the annual staffing time (14 members of staff) per member of staff to support ‘Talking Together’ is 70 hours (three and half hours for each of the 20 events). Timings allow for being present at the main event plus time needed for setting up and dismantling.



Not all staff will be engaged in all 20 events for example those staff who work within a Street Scene area e.g. Street Scene Operatives and Youth Workers, Community Development workers will only be involved in the ‘Talking Together’ sessions held within their area (four events, 14 hours). Core staff e.g. staff within the Connecting with Communities team will be required to attend all events.

The ‘Talking Together’ timings e.g. Saturday working and evenings, would entitle those staff on pay point M or below to be eligible for an overtime payment at plain time for all hours worked between 6.00 a.m. and midnight. This payment is not eligible for staff that are above point M. Bearing in mind we will be relying on staff, who are most likely those in the organisation already working in excess of contracted hours, to work evenings and weekends, it would be appropriate to allow time off in lieu. The table below reflects the staffing costs including a calculation for on costs. Also included in the table below is the estimated cost for administrative support.

Table 2: Talking Together Costs

Activity	Comments	Cost
Publicity	4 x 1 page article to Town Crier to publicise events (November, February, May, August £950 for one full page ( Costs to promote this are covered in the £12k to revamp the Town Crier)  Flyers to go out to schools prior to each event (40,000 in total - 10,000 each time November, February, May, August)	-  3,000
Venue Hire	October (x 5 venues) January (x 5 venues) April (x 5 venues)	2,250
Hire of Market Stalls	July to be located in parks (x5) Hire of Market Stalls transport and setting up and taking down costs	2,400
Talking Together feedback leaflet	Feedback leaflets to be sent out to people on the database prior to the next meeting In March send out to every household including timetable for the next year	5,000
Family fun activities	20 events (£200 each event)	4,000
Crèche	Crèche facility	3,710
Uniformed professional information, stationary and postage	Pens, flipchart paper, postage exhibition materials	6,000
Refreshments	Teas, coffees etc	500

Staffing payments	Staff costs taking into account those staff who would be eligible for overtime payments	6,708
Staffing TOIL (1)	The cost to the authority for TOIL	10,000
Admin Support	Hiring venues, typing up information, collating feedback information 40 days (two days per session)	500
Town Centre Market Stall	Hiring a monthly pitch on the Town Centre Market	1,000
Total		45,068

17. The annual cost for ‘Talking Together’ to the Council, including staffing is £45,068 (time off in lieu is not a real cost unless additional resources are employed to provide cover for staff engaged in ‘ Talking Together’).
18. The Director of Community Services is particularly keen on the establishment of locality drop in sessions in order to have a better vehicle to engage with the wider community on Street Scene issues and can contribute £10,000 towards the cost of this initiative from LAA monies for 07/08. The Police have indicated that for this year they are able to contribute £15,000. However, the PCT are only able to support the initiative via staffing.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

19. Consultation has been undertaken with officers responsible in implementing the implementation plan attached to this report to determine their requirements.

### **Legal Implications**

20. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

21. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

22. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council’s policy framework.

### **Decision Deadline**

23. For the purpose of the ‘call-in’ procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

## **Key Decisions**

24. This is classed as a key decision and has been included in the forward plan.

## **Recommendation**

25. It is recommended that :-

- (a) The estimated costs of £145,500 and recruitment to the two additional posts be approved.
- (b) The Implementation Plan be approved

## **Reasons**

26. The recommendations are supported to deliver on the Council's agenda to strengthen community engagement

**Lorraine O'Donnell**  
**Assistant Chief Executive**

## **Background Papers**

None

author Sharon Brown : Extension 2684