
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND ENGAGEMENT PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

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

Talking Together

2. A review of Talking Together has taken place that established that over 500 people attended the locality events with over 5000 people engaged in Talking Together overall. The focus for the next round of Talking Together will concentrate on the development and planning brief for the Feethams site. To try to encourage more residents to attend a mixture of indoor, outdoor, road shows and events in parks have been planned including a Talking Together event to be held on High Row. Development work is underway on online engagement.

Community Partnerships

3. A review of Community Partnerships is nearing completion. As part of the process focus group sessions have been held with Community Partnership representatives. In addition members had the opportunity to feed in their views by attending one of four focus group sessions. To help inform the review visits have been made to neighbouring authorities to examine community development models.

During April and May of this year the Community Partnerships working with partners have attracted £80,000 of external monies for the delivery of local projects. Monies have been secured from Fair Share to fund the employment of the Fair Share Community Development worker, improvements to Pensbury Street play area and funding towards the cost of refurbishing North Lodge Bandstand. Awards for all have provided funding for Adult Literacy and Numeracy courses to be run in the priority wards. Funding from the Community Resource grant was used to fund a Fun Run and Lascelles Community Partnership's Green Fair. I would like to thank the residents leading these projects and partnerships for their support.

Meeting with Parish Councils

4. I attended a meeting of the borough's parish councils with a view to improving the relationships between the council and parish councils. It was a very positive meeting and I was impressed by the enthusiasm all round. A constructive discussion took place to instigate the review of parish grants.

Community Engagement Diary

5. The Council's Community Engagement Diary is up and running and a programme of training for key Council officers was undertaken in June 08.

Complaints

6. A new Complaints Manager has been appointed and commences employment on the 11th August 2008.

Place Survey

7. All Local Authorities are required to undertake a new survey 'Place Survey' every two years. Preparations are currently underway for the survey to be undertaken in the Autumn of this year. The survey will ask local people for their views about the area in which they live. The results of the survey will provide data on the new National Indicators.

Meetings

8. Since the last progress report I have attended the following meetings:

Third Sector Relationships

3rd June – I helped tidy an older person's garden as part of a volunteering challenge to promote Employer Supported Volunteering.

4th June – I attended the annual Darlington Volunteering Awards ceremony.

5th June – I met with volunteers at the Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Service

11th June – I met with the Chair of Evolution and Assistant Chief Executive to discuss the Third Sector Strategy and future arrangements for liaison.

24th June – I attended a meeting of the Chairs and Chief Officers of Darlington's voluntary sector organisations.

25th June – I took part in a steering group meeting examining the Voluntary Sector Compact.

26th June – I attended the Darlington Association on Disability scooter and wheelchair safety event.

27th June – I met with the Chief Executive at the 700 Club.

4th July – Visit to the YMCA.

10th July – Attended the Citizens Advice Bureau AGM.

Community Partnerships

3rd June – I attended a meeting of the Community Partnerships Steering Group to discuss the future of the group in light of the review of Community Partnerships.

5th June – I assisted in workshop sessions for Councillors to give their views on the review of Community Partnerships.

17th and 18th June – I was a speaker at the Excellent Partnerships conference at Wynyard Hall.

16th July – Attended a Local Strategic Partnership Board meeting.

Community Engagement

4th June – A meeting of staff and partners involved with Talking Together to gather their views on how the events can be improved.

1st July – I was a panel member at the Social Future Institute Conference at the University of Teesside, promoting the work being done to improve community engagement in Darlington.

15th July – I attended a meeting of the Harrowgate Hill School Council.

17th July – Took part in the Town Hall Treasure Hunt designed to explain how democracy works for young people.

Customer Service

10th June – I visited the Children’s Centre at McNay Street to talk with staff about customer service.

24th June – I visited the Arts Centre to talk with staff about the importance of excellent customer service.

Member with Portfolio for Communities and Engagement Portfolio Councillor Jenny Chapman