
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.

Community Engagement

- 2 Consultation has been ongoing in relation to the Town Fringe including a walking tour on Thursday 8 July and a Talking Together event on Thursday 15 July at the Dolphin Centre.
- 3 Ten people came on the walk and fifteen people came to the Talking Together event and were very positive about the opportunity to comment on the potential future of the Town Fringe.
- 4 The Community Workers completed 'Planning for Real' training earlier in the year to help the community representatives to make models of the areas being developed. The models are made of card with different thematic colours which you pin onto the model. For example environmental cards are green, health facilities are blue, traffic issues are red etc.
- 5 The Talking Together event displayed the 'Planning for Real' models which had been made by the young people at the YMCA and at Top Deck. The Community Workers for Central and Northgate are midway through a 'Planning for Real tour'. They went to Borough Road Nursery on the 14 July where they spoke to around 40 parents and staff to find out their views and priorities for the area.
- 6 Part of the Town Centre Fringe project involved National Architect's week where Tim Crawshaw, the Town Centre Fringe Planning Officer brought together representatives from other Councils to a Darlington Partnership event based upon the Town Centre Fringe.
- 7 Connecting with Communities is supporting IPPR North by participating in a quick regional mapping exercise (using a bespoke tool) on the quality and effectiveness of community engagement and empowerment work in the North East. The work is funded through the regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership. When complete the work will give us a more objective sense of how strong Darlington's neighbourhoods are. This will inform the Council's approach to community resilience work in the future. It is anticipated that the work will be complete by October 2010.
- 8 Seventeen people came to the Talking Together Local Transport Plan informal drop in sessions on the Friday 16 and Saturday 17 July (5 on the Friday and 5 on the Saturday).

These were part of a series of consultation events about the LTP and builds on a number of workshops with different groups of people

Welfare Rights

- 9 The service opened 32 new enquiries in July, and 44 were closed. At the end of June the total “live” caseload for the team was 135 cases. Case allocation work has now been rationalised and waiting time to see an advisor has been reduced from six weeks to three to four weeks. During July £88, 864.31 in additional benefits was secured for clients.
- 10 Further ways to improve the service are currently being modelled, with an emphasis on researching how the team can move the focus of some of its work upstream from appeals representation to prevention.

Community Development and Fair Share

- 11 A number of the partnerships have held activities over the summer months including a Green Fair at Lascelles, a Fun Day at Eastbourne and play schemes at Branksome, Park East, Lingfield and Red Hall. These have been very well received in the local community and have brought together people of different ages and backgrounds, helping to break down perceived barriers and encourage people to work together for common goals.
- 12 There is ongoing work to continue to build broader links within the locality with schools, local churches and other local groups including residents associations and Children’s Centres. Activities with other public sector partners continues with continuing support for PACTs but also for work with the newly appointed health trainers relating to nutrition and activity.
- 13 The Albert Hill Play Park was officially opened on 14th August and was well supported by the local residents and voluntary groups including the YMCA. Central Partnership had led work with Groundwork throughout the development of this project and it is the culmination of a great deal of hard work over a number of months.
- 14 A number of Fair Share projects have been completed including Pensbury Street and Albert Hill Park. Work has been continuing on the proposed capital bid for Widdowfield Street Scout Headquarters and a draft business plan is now in place. Work has also begun to develop governance arrangements for the project to ensure that there are clear mechanisms for all of the stakeholder groups to work together effectively.

Third Sector Development

- 15 Further work has continued with Third Sector and public sector organisations to implement the Targeted Support Fund activity relating to Third Sector Commissioning. A meeting of the original group came together on the 9 August to agree an implementation plan. Discussion took place about the need to revisit the context and focus for this work in the face of a changing financial landscape and the need for more robust joint working to meet the challenges that we need to face in the near future.

Single Equality Scheme

- 16 During June and July five engagement sessions were held for people with an interest in working with the Council to develop a new Single Equality Scheme. Participants were targeted according to the interest in one or more of six themes: race, age, disability, faith, gender, pregnancy and maternity and strategic issues. Work with Gay Advice Darlington developed further input from those with an interest in gender reassignment and sexual orientation. The strategic issues workshop was something of a landmark in the way that it brought together leading representatives from some of Darlington's most diverse communities to debate priorities together around the same table. Some shared priorities were identified and work has now started on reality testing these ideas and drafting a new scheme.
- 17 The development of the new scheme is part of the Council's response to the Equality Act which became law earlier this year. At present the guidance is still awaited that will inform our implementation plan. It is still unclear whether the socio-economic characteristic will remain in the Act and this will impact on links to the One Darlington priority of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

LINK

- 18 The annual report has now been completed and was discussed by the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on the 24 August 2010.
- 19 Further information is awaited about the plans for LINK to become Healthwatch. This is the new mechanisms for consultation and engagement set out in the latest government White Paper 'Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS'. This new mechanism will include the current role that LINK have but will in addition include an advocacy and complaints function. A shadow Healthwatch should be operational by mid 2011.

Councillor Andy Scott
Cabinet Member with Communities and Engagement Portfolio