
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 Talking Together event was held on 6 November at the Dolphin Centre to discuss proposals concerning cycling through the town centre. Sixty-four people attended the event (excluding stallholders and Members) and a number of issues were discussed, including sustainable travel, disabled people's issues and public safety. Residents who were unable to attend the event were also able to leave responses to the consultation by telephone to Connecting with Communities and online. Over 900 'hits' were made to the website and just under thirty responses received by telephone.
3. A report based on the above event has been submitted to the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee for their meeting on 7th November. This will provide up-to-date evidence of resident views as part of the ongoing review process.
4. On 20th November an event will take place supported by the GOLD Team and GOLD Members and will involve residents in an event to look at transport issues. This event will include information stands and discussion about all aspects of transport including walking, cycling, taxis, buses and trains. A Talk-Time session will take place from 2:30pm until 4pm where previously submitted questions will be put to a panel that includes private sector representatives, representatives from transport and licensing at Darlington Borough Council, representatives from Darlington Memorial Hospital and Third Sector representatives.
5. An event will take place on 20th November in the evening to look at the issue of Supported Buses that are paid for by the Council. This also includes a Talk Time session where residents can ask questions about these services.
6. Talking Together consultation events are also taking place to support development of the Local Development Framework. Representatives from Planning and Connecting with Communities teams are in the Cornmill Centre on 10th November. Representatives are also attending the International Day on 16th November at the Forum Music Centre.
7. Building on last year's success, Talking Together is also supporting consultation with residents about the Council's budget. This includes asking peoples views at a stand in the Cornmill Centre on 10th and 11th November. Information will also be available at the International Day. Further details will be available in the next report to Cabinet.

GOLD

8. The GOLD team has recently been transferred into the Connecting with Communities Team and the review of future working is progressing.
 - (a) Representatives from Darlington Borough Council have met with GOLD members to discuss the development of a single steering group to replace the series of theme groups. The steering group would then commission time-limited task and finish groups to undertake specific pieces of work.
 - (b) Two further review meetings are planned with GOLD members and they are also invited to write in, e-mail or telephone in with comments that will form part of the review process.
 - (c) The draft Podiatry Report has now been forwarded to Darlington Primary Care Trust. GOLD members will continue to be involved in work with the PCT to look at future commissioning of podiatry services.
 - (d) Representatives of GOLD have been involved in a national Inter-Generational Workshop event held in Darlington to look at increased opportunities for joint working. The YMCA is also helping with the GOLD Christmas party, an event run and paid for directly by GOLD members.
 - (e) The team are also involved in work with the Community Sports Network to look at ways to encourage older people to get active. This is at an early stage but will help to support the health outcomes in a number of key strategic plans.

Other Community Engagement Activity

9. Outlined below is a summary of other Community Engagement Activity that has taken place since my last report:
 - (a) Central Partnership is discussing ways to support the development and implementation of the Local Development Framework.
 - (b) LINK (Local Involvement Network) has now appointed a community engagement worker responsible for increasing the breadth of membership prior to elections to the Core Group in March. An interim Core Group is in place and has been responsible for the development of governance arrangements.
 - (c) An International Day has now been planned and will take place on 16th November at Forum Music Centre. A range of multi-cultural activities will take place during the day. Representatives from recruitment at Darlington Borough Council will have a stand at the event to highlight current job vacancies in the Council and to encourage applications from BME residents. This includes raising awareness that they can apply in their preferred language.

Local Democracy Week

‘I’m a Councillor, Get me out of here!’

10. As part of this Council’s approach to Local Democracy Week 2008, six Members of Darlington Borough Council participated in the national ‘I’m a Councillor, Get me out of here!’ event. ‘I’m a Councillor, Get me out of here!’ is a two week, on-line event which utilises communication technology that children and young people are familiar with, and aims to:
 - (a) break down barriers between Councillors and young people;
 - (b) engage young in local democracy;
 - (c) provide the opportunity for Councillors to find out how young people feel about local issues, their concerns and enthusiasms; and
 - (d) increase the links between Councils and schools.
11. Every Primary and Secondary School in the Borough was invited to participate in the event, as well as relevant youth organisations, and the response the Council received was very positive.
12. Each Member received their own set of individual web pages on the ‘I’m a Councillor, Get me out of here!’ website, on which they posted their youth manifesto and a brief profile. Access to the website for children and young people was regulated by individual Access Codes, which were distributed by Teachers and Officers. The website was also fully moderated by our partners in the event, Gallomanor Communications Ltd., and this ensured that the site was completely secure for young people.
13. The website went live on Monday, 6th October 2008, and children and young people were able to ask those Members involved questions, who answered them on-line in their own time. All questions and answers then appeared on the website so that children and young people could read what had already been asked and answered. Members also engaged in ‘live chat’ in chatrooms, and the children and young people were given the opportunity to vote for the Member they wanted to win the event.
14. On Monday, 13th October 2008, the Member with the fewest votes was ‘evicted’, and each day thereafter a further eviction took place. On Friday, 17th October 2008, Councillor Chris McEwan was declared the winner, having amassed 46 percent of the overall vote.
15. The event received a large amount of coverage in the local media, with numerous articles appearing in the Northern Echo, the Herald and Post, and the Darlington and Stockton Times. During the second week, the Northern Echo provided a daily update on the evictions. Items also appeared on the Northern Echo website, the rE-view website and Alpha Radio.
16. Post-event evaluation produced by Gallomanor Communications Ltd. has revealed that this Council’s involvement in the event proved highly successful. Not only were the most votes cast by children and young people in Darlington, compared to any other Council involved in the event, the evaluation report stated that:

17. *'Darlington did stupendously well this year. As you can see from the statistics, you had more young people registered, more page views and more said in live chat than any other council. Often you've got more than double the average activity levels – nearly **five** times the average for chat by young people. When you consider that this was Darlington's first year of taking part, and that your population is a fraction of many of our councils, it's even more impressive. Frankly, we can't praise you highly enough.'* **Event Evaluation 2008, Darlington Borough Council, Gallomanor Communications Ltd.**

'Political Speed Dating' at Hurworth Comprehensive School

18. In support of Local Democracy Week, and the 'I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here!' on-line event, five Members attended a 'Political Speed Dating' event at Hurworth Comprehensive School on Friday, 10th October 2008. The five Members rotated around five tutorial groups, spending ten minutes with each group to explain their role as a councillor and taking questions from the pupils.

'Question Time' at Hummersknott School and Language College

19. As part of Hummersknott School and Language College's 'Citizenship Day' on Tuesday, 14th October 2008, four Members participated in a 'Question Time' style event. Based on the television programme of the same name, students submitted questions for the Members to respond to. The themes involved youth provision and facilities in the town, and anti-social behaviour in Darlington.

Citizenship Ceremony at Hummersknott School and Language College

20. To complement the 'Question Time' Session, Hummersknott School and Language College was also the venue for a Citizenship Ceremony on Tuesday, 14th October 2008, during which British citizenship was conferred on seven new citizens. The Ceremony was attended by several civic dignitaries, including the Mayor of Darlington, Councillor Ian Haszeldine, and observed by the pupils of Year 10.

'Are you Registered?' – Carmel R.C. College

21. Staff from the Democratic Services Section and the Youth Service held an awareness raising event in the Sixth Form Common Room at Carmel R.C. College on Thursday, 16th October 2008. The event aimed to raise awareness of the democratic process and voting in young people approaching eighteen years of age. The event also consulted on what young people wanted in Darlington, and promoted the 'I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here!' on-line event.

Community Partnerships

22. The review of the Community Partnerships is ongoing and now forms part of the more strategic review of the unit as a whole. This will ensure that the unit works more effectively together to improve service delivery.

23. The Community Partnerships have been involved in delivery of half-term activities for children and families. This has included a range of activities provided either directly by the partnerships or through agreements with others. These activities have been well-attended and appreciated by members of the community.
24. Park East Community Partnership came second in the Northern Echo 'Making a Difference' competition and will be awarded their prize shortly by David Bellamy.

Voluntary and Community Sector

25. The Voluntary and Community Sector Liaison Manager is continuing to work closely with eVOLution to deliver the Third Sector Strategy. To take work on the Compact and Funding Review forward a workshop has been organised for 24 November to ensure initial discussion with a few representatives can be tested and challenged by a wider group before policies and implementation is taken forward.
26. An initial meeting to involve the sector in service planning has taken place to illustrate the constraints that we currently face. Senior officers from policy and finance from Darlington Borough Council explained the processes involved and the way that the council receives its funding. The sector responded very favourably to the event and a further one is planned in January to move discussions towards development and implementation.
27. Representatives from the sector and the VCS Liaison Manager are currently in discussion with government office to look at ways to support Third Sector Commissioning in the North East. The current review of Supporting People services has been very effective in involving the sector. There have been difficulties at times with the process but these have been overcome and are resulting in best practice that can inform other commissioning and procurement activity.
28. A partnership proposal for Big Lottery Funding including CAB, Age Concern and Welfare Rights within Darlington Borough Council has been successful in bringing £479,000 into the Borough for legal advice services. Partners are currently working with VCS Liaison Manager and Contracts Manager in Legal Services to develop a Partnership Agreement to ensure clear governance arrangements are in place. The partnership will also be taken through the council's risk assessment toolkit to ensure risks are mitigated as much as possible. This should provide learning for future consortia working within the sector and amongst a range of partner agencies.

Meetings

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

30 September - I had a meeting with Rob Jones, Head of Darlington's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to discuss community safety and engagement.

1 October - I spoke at a meeting of voluntary and community sector representatives about the review of strategic funding.

6 - 17 October - I took part in the I'm a Councillor Get Me Out Of Here event.

7 October - I attended a meeting of the Community Partnerships steering group.

8 October - I took part in a Children's Services planning day putting the case for more extensive working with the voluntary sector.

10 October - I took part in a question and answer 'speed dating' style event at Hurworth School.

14 October - I took part in a Question Time style debate and classroom activity at Hummersknott School.

15 October - I attended a meeting with the Director of Children's Services and colleagues to discuss the role of the voluntary sector in the delivery of services for young people.

17 October - I met with the Director of Evolution and other voluntary sector representatives to discuss Darlington's Compact.

17 October - I attended a presentation of Emily Christer MYP's work to date on her manifesto.

23 October - Shopmobility Steering Group.

23 October - Friends of the Earth meeting at the Quaker Meeting House.

10 November - I visited an Adult Services initiative in Harrowgate Hill ward.

10 November - I arranged a discussion with Chief Inspector Paul Unsworth concerning Talking Together.

11 November - Meeting with Gill Walker, Assistant Director Children's Services, to discuss third sector procurement.

12 November - LSP Board meeting where I gave a presentation on Talking Together and engagement in Darlington.

12 November - Attended the North East Social Capital Forum in North Tyneside

13 November - Met with volunteers at the Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Service.

17 November - Took part in the Town Hall Treasure Hunt with young people from Alderman Leach School.

20 November - I attended the Darlington Association on Disability Annual Meeting.

20 November - I attended the Annual Meeting of the 700 Club.

24 November - I introduced the Darlington Compact Planning and Funding Review Event at the Dolphin Centre.

25 November - I attended the Evolution Board Meeting.

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