
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND ENGAGEMENT PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

1. Further to the content of my last report to Council, the following are the main areas of work under my Communities and Engagement Portfolio:

Talking Together

2. On 20 November a Transport Listening Event was facilitated by the Gold team and supported by Gold members with a broad focus on transport issues for older and disabled people. This event included information stands and discussion about all aspects of transport including walking, cycling, taxis, buses and trains. A Talk Time session dealt with questions that had been submitted in advance and responses were heard from a panel that included representatives from the private sector, transport policy at Darlington Borough Council and the third sector. A summary of answers given on the day and answers to questions which were unable to be aired due to a lack of time will be published on the website soon. 136 people attended the event.
3. Later on the same day was Talking Together about Supported Buses. This included an “open access” Talk Time session where residents asked questions about specific routes, services and decision-making processes. Again, feedback will be published on the website and a summary report has been fed directly into the scrutiny process. 28 people attended this event.
4. As indicated in my last report, Talking Together consultation events have taken place to support the development of both the Local Development Framework and the Medium Term Financial Plan. Representatives from the Planning, Finance and Connecting with Communities teams engaged with shoppers in the Cornmill Centre on 10 and 11 November. More than sixty written comments were subsequently received on financial matters.

Community Development

5. A community-led International Day was delivered on 16 November at the Forum Music Centre. Over 750 attendees (that’s the equivalent of more than a third of the borough’s entire BME population) experienced exciting aspects of Asian, European, Caribbean, Romany and African culture. This event helped to build community cohesion through storytelling, music, crafts, food and cultural history.
6. Work with Community Partnerships continues. Four broadly representative examples of this activity are given below:

- (a) With support from a Council community development worker Park East Community Partnership continue to deliver their community garden project at the Coleridge Centre. The project recently received from Dr David Bellamy (on behalf of the Northern Echo) a prize for making a difference;
- (b) Lascelles and Bank Top Partnerships are receiving support to develop a £50,000 Big Lottery funding application for a shared open spaces project between Lascelles green and Eastbourne Park;
- (c) North Road Community Partnership have helped to deliver (with support from the police and the youth service) an event at Escapade for 200 young people as an extension of a previous DOSH-funded project;
- (d) Branksome and Cockerton West Community Partnerships have received £5,000 through Children's Services locality funding to build on past successes.

GOLD

- 7. The GOLD team has recently been transferred into the Connecting with Communities Team and the first round of consultation on future working has ended. An exploratory meeting with GOLD members to look at implementation of new ways of working has been scheduled for mid-January 09.
- 8. The health group's report from the survey they undertook on local podiatry services has now been published. It is anticipated that this will lead to service improvements in the future.

Voluntary and Community Sector

- 9. As the credit crunch begins to bite partner organisations are noticing an increase in demand for legal services. This will be supported by the Local Advice Network Darlington (LAND), a business plan, partnership agreement, risk assessment and communications plan for which have been sent to Big Lottery ahead of schedule.
- 10. A compact and funding review workshop held on 24 November was attended by more than 40 representatives from the third and public sectors. It was agreed that a lot of progress had been made on some difficult issues.
- 11. A return has been submitted to GONE showing the level of the Council's financial support for the third sector. This includes expenditure over £7.3m on goods and services, community grant of £57,000 (including discretionary rate relief) and strategic grant valued at £283,000. Work continues around commissioning with the sector. This includes eVOLution representing the sector through the Supporting People review and commissioning process by taking a place on the Commissioning Body.
- 12. Darlington Partnership, together with the Council and eVOLution are now part of a Tees Valley infrastructure consortium in order to ensure that Darlington is in a stronger position to both influence policy and bid for funding on the regional and subregional stages.

Welfare Rights

13. The Welfare Rights Service benefit take-up target for 2008/09 is £1 million. During the period 17.11.08 to 16.12.08, £123,674 in additional benefits was secured for clients. The total for the year so far is £971,677 (133% of profile target). The Service ran an advice surgery at the Middleton-St-George secure psychiatric hospital on 21 November. The hospital funds these surgeries.
14. The Service hosted a training event on Community Care Grants on 2 December which was attended by 21 officers and advisers from Welfare Rights, Age Concern Darlington, Darlington CAB, and Adult Social Services. Further supporting the social inclusion agenda, welfare rights officer assisted with a promotional event for Carers Rights Day run by Darlington Association on Disability at Sainsbury's supermarket on 5 December.

Meetings

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

25th November - Evolution Board Meeting.

27th November - Met with Directors of Humanitics, a Darlington based Community Interest Company.

28th November - Attended the Tees Valley Social Enterprise Conference.

12th December - Met with Council Officers and Third Sector representatives to discuss commissioning between the voluntary sector and Children's Services.

15th December - Met with Board Member of Darlington Partnership to discuss One Darlington and a proposal to establish a group examining Social Capital.

19th January - I attended a Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership workshop about Community Engagement.

27th January - I attended the Holocaust Memorial Service.

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