
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. On 24th November at 6pm we were Talking Together about the Local Transport Plan in Central Hall. Although the Tees Valley Rural Community Council gave a rural perspective on the issues at hand it was surprising that there wasn't as strong representation from Darlington's rural communities as expected. Feedback from the 38 people who attended will be used to shape the next Local Transport Plan.
3. On 30th November 20 people dropped in to Talking Together about the Town Centre Conservation. There was lively debate and people's views will help to structure a character appraisal which will guide decisions made on planning applications in the affected area.
4. Three strategic engagement programmes will begin in January. They will focus on the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements Project, Council and key partners' budgets for the coming year, Local Development Framework and Town Centre Fringe. The latter is a large-scale piece of work that will include branded public events at various locations around the borough next year.

Third Sector Developments

5. A consultation event was held by eVOLution in November to seek third sector views on the Compact codes. The feedback has been very positive from the sector who see it as a clear indication of a commitment from both sectors to work more effectively together in the future.
6. Karen Grundy, Executive Director of eVOLution, and Mary Hall, VCS Liaison Manager, were asked to present at an IDeA Conference in York. The aim of the presentation was to discuss the benefits of the Partnership Improvement Partnership. This was a programme run by IDEA and IVAR for which Darlington was one of the pilot areas. Whilst we still have a long way to go in Darlington it was pleasing to see that we are nevertheless a long way ahead of a number of authorities in our commissioning work.
7. We have been invited to participate in further work with the PCT and partner organisations to continue to develop the commissioning skills of voluntary organisations supported by the Targeted Support Fund (funded by the Dept of Health). A paper will be prepared setting out proposals for this work which will need to take place over the next twelve months. This

change should assist organisations to increase their skills in commissioning and include the opportunity to develop social clauses in tender documents.

Community Development

8. Connecting with Communities has been instrumental in securing £35,000 of community cashback funding from the Home Office to improve security in and around Skerne Park Community Centre and will work with colleagues on Children's Services on implementation. The team has worked closely with the police to ensure the shortlisting of 22 small Darlington retailers for further small-scale Home Office funding (less than £3,000 per award) to improve shop security at various locations in the borough. Final decisions about funding are conditional upon the completion of "due diligence" checks now being carried out.
9. Connecting with Communities has planned, organised, promoted and delivered eight training sessions to 54 volunteers in the eight week period up until the end of November. The training covered areas as diverse as event planning, membership development, effective partnership working and the bigger picture on strengthening communities. It has helped the volunteers with whom we work to become more effective in their roles.

Welfare Rights

10. During October, £58,867.31 in additional benefits were secured for welfare rights service clients. The total for the year to date is £601,752.43 (86% of profile target).
11. A new Welfare Rights Manager has been appointed and will start in the new year.

LINK

12. The LINK membership is growing and we have got three new members onto the core group. These representatives are already having an impact and bring a range of skills include media and marketing and knowledge of carers issues. An advertising campaign on local buses will take place in the New Year to try to attract more members and encourage residents to raise issues of concern about health and social care.
13. Work is currently taking place on learning disabled people and access to GP services. This work is being undertaken with the Learning Disability Partnership and the PCT. The first "enter and view" of acute stroke services is now in the final planning stage and the necessary pre-visit training has taken place.

LAND

14. It has been agreed that in future the LAND project will be known as CAP (Community Advice Project). Feedback has shown that some of the public are put off by the term "legal" being in the title of the programme. The Big Lottery has agreed to this name change and the partnership agreement will be amended accordingly.

Councillor Andy Scott
Cabinet Member with Communities and Engagement Portfolio