
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 programme of 11 Talking Together events on the Planning and Development Brief for the Feethams site was undertaken over a four week period over the summer. A mix of approaches to the Talking Together events took place including locality meetings in street scene areas, road show events in the Town Centre, outside a shopping parade and in two parks as well as specific events for disabled people.
3. This round of Talking Together completed the Council's commitment to hold Talking Together events in every ward, and also marked the beginning of a new approach, which saw a more high profile visible presence in higher footfall areas. 563 people took the opportunity to talk to the staff about the proposals and many raised other issues. In total 407 people took the opportunity to 'have their say' on the Planning and Development brief and provided written responses either by completion of questionnaires, e-mails or letters.
4. Another development in the new approach to Talking Together is the adoption of the brand for other Council consultations. A Talking Together on Traffic Management proposals was carried out by the Highways and Engineering Department. Following a widespread leaflet drop in the locality, over 65 people attended a public meeting at St Andrew's Church on the 4th of August 2008, and over 100 written responses have been received on the proposals. Responses are currently being analysed.
5. Work is still progressing on with the Talking Together Task and Finish Review of Traffic Management arrangements at Middleton- St- George. The Task and Finish Review Group made up of residents and staff are to meet again in October to discuss the outcomes of the review with the Assistant Director for Highways.
6. Since my last report, a white paper has been published encouraging all local authorities to initiate or reinvigorate their approaches to community engagement. Aspects of Talking Together such as the availability of senior members and officers to respond to the public's concerns are now seen as required practices nationally. In the coming months we will continue to revise Talking Together to ensure that we learn from what works and statutory guidance. The first step of this is the expansion of the Talking Together brand to cover all of the council's engagement, designing events around specific issues and engaging communities of interest such as older people or young people. This process is underway as reported above and is already leading to higher turnouts for engagement events.

Talking Together will be working with the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee to consult on cycling in the Town Centre on 6 November.

GOLD

7. The GOLD team has recently been transferred into the Connecting with Communities Team and are relocated in what was the Tourist Information Centre. They have undertaken a number of initiatives including:
 - (a) Involvement in the annual Tea Dance for older people held in the Market Square. The event is staged each year to promote the services available in the town for people over the age of 50. It is estimated that over 600 people attended the event.
 - (b) Holding a Positive Health Day on the 11th of September at Darlington Football Club. The event was supported by a wide range of professionals including health and social care staff. Attendees were able to discuss health issues and have their blood pressure checked.
 - (c) Co-ordinating consultation on behalf of the PCT to inform the review of the Podiatry Service. The GOLD team have sent out questionnaires on the GOLD data base, liaised with Age Concern in relation to completion of questionnaires and visited the Podiatry Clinic to survey users of the clinic. In total 195 questionnaires have been completed.

Other Community Engagement Activity

8. Outlined below is a summary of other Community Engagement Activity that has taken place since my last report:
 - (a) The Planning Department are in the early stages of preparing a Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document. In June and July five workshops were held. In total 39 residents attended together with seven Councillors.
 - (b) A LINKs event (Local Involvement Network) was held on the 10th of July 2008. The network brings together individuals and organisations interested in Adult Social Care and Health issues. 40 individuals attended the event the purpose of which was to develop governance arrangements, codes of conduct for the LINK. A presentation was given by the Head of Planning, Partnerships and Development at Darlington Primary Care Trust about the new commissioning process in the NHS.
 - (c) Children's Services ran a Secondary School Council event on the 9th of July 2008. 43 young people attended the event, representing School Councils from secondary schools around the Borough. The aim of the event was to share good practice and support young people to plan School Council activities for the next school year. The Young People also had an opportunity to take part in the following workshops:
 - I. Greener Schools
 - II. Healthy Schools
 - III. Alcohol and Young People
 - IV. Beauty and the bike (why don't young women cycle?)
 - V. Schools Newsletter
 - VI. Feethams Consultation

VII. Myplace

- (d) Along with the usual summer children activities, the Youth Service organised a series of events held in the Market Square linked to the five key themes of Every Child Matters. The idea behind the days was for organisations to showcase and publicise what they were doing to meet the Every Child Matters outcomes in Darlington.

Community Partnerships

9. In August, Central Community Partnership's Pensbury Street play area project came to fruition. The play area was opened by the Mayor. The opening brought to conclusion the hard work of Central Community Partnership in turning a run down, no go area into a vibrant play area for both children and young people. Central Community Partnership supported by their Community Development Worker have worked in partnership with Fair Share, Ground Work, Uniformed Wardens, Street Scene, the Youth Service, YMCA, the Police, local residents, young people and ward councillors, to obtain funding of over £100,000 to transform the space. Funding was obtained from Fair Share, Comic Relief, the Esh Foundation, HSBC and the LAA.

Voluntary and Community Sector

10. The Voluntary and Community Sector Liaison Manager is continuing to work closely with eVolution and together with the Head of Strategic Procurement and Contract Management is investigating how procurement opportunities can be strengthened with the sector. Darlington's approach on partnership working with the sector has been formally recognised by Sir Jeremy Beecham who was the key note speaker at a national conference on the Compact Debate and commended our work facilitated by the IDeA on our approach to further strengthen partnership work with the sector.

Meetings

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

22nd July – I attended the first part of a national third sector procurement training programme in Newcastle.

23rd July – I attended a Cabinet Office event at Westminster for Council's seeking to support a thriving third sector and increase volunteering in their communities.

28th July – I attended a meeting of Darlington Environmental Forum

30th July – I attended a meeting of the Board at eVolution.

30th July – I chaired two Talking Together sessions as part of the consultation on the future of the Feethams site.

1st August – I met with officers at eVolution to discuss the promotion of Employer Supported Volunteering

7th August – Together with the Cabinet Member for Resources I met with representatives from Grange Road Baptist Church.

7th August – I met with Paul Unsworth Chief Inspector Darlington Police to discuss the future of community engagement in Darlington.

11th August – I attended the unveiling of a picture of Darlington's first woman Councillor.

19th August – I met with the Assistant Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company to discuss their operations and community involvement in Darlington.

2nd September – I met with the Chair of the Association of Parish Councils to discuss the review of Parish Grants.

3rd September – I met with the Chair and Chief Executive at eVolution.

4th September – I met with volunteers and young people from Newblood Live to discuss the future of the project.

5th September – I met with Julie Brown from the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership to discuss community engagement.

10th September – I attended a meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership Board.

11th September – I met with Emily Christer, Darlington's Member of the Youth Parliament.

15th September – I attended a meeting organised by Mike Hill from the Citizens Advice Bureau to discuss Social Capital in Darlington.

17th September – I met with Nadeem Ahmad from the North East Asylum and Refugee Support Service.

18th September – I attended a meeting of Heighington Parish Council.

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