

**HEALTHY BOROUGH WITH
STRONG COMMUNITIES
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

STATE OF THE BOROUGH
STRONG COMMUNITIES
REVIEW GROUP REPORT
NOVEMBER 2008

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Introduction

The Borough's Community Strategy identifies four key ambitions, Healthy, Strong, Prosperous and Attractive, which forms a statement of '*Working towards a more healthy, prosperous and attractive borough with strong communities.*'

Contribution to these ambitions requires the Council and its Partners to work in partnership and deliver services, projects, initiatives to improve the Quality of Life within the Borough.

The aim of this report is to highlight achievements made by the Council and its partners towards delivering of Quality of Life topics that contribute to achieving the ambition of a Borough with Strong Communities

A definition of a Borough with Strong Communities is where 'people can access the housing they want in attractive and safe neighbourhoods.

The following quality of Life topics which contribute to a Borough with Strong Communities have been examined within this report:-

- Crime & Disorder
- Community Cohesion
- Housing

Each topic is reported by the following sections, key statistics, what we know with regard to each topic within the Borough, current and planned activity and conclusions and recommendations.

Executive Summary

Review Group Membership

Councillors Mrs P. Crathorne, Mrs J. Gray, T. Hogan, Mrs E.M. Paylor, K. Thompson and Mrs M. Thomson (Tenant Representative)

Rationale

Following an extensive community appraisal and consultation a Community Strategy for Sedgefield Borough was published by the Local Strategic Partnership in 2004. The Strategy identifies the key economic, social and environmental issues facing the Borough and sets out a vision for the Borough in 2014 as a 'Healthy, Prosperous and Attractive Borough with Strong Communities'.

It is structured around these four aims, setting out a number of supporting priorities and targets to be addressed under which specific service improvements will be developed.

Four years after the first publication of the Community Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committees decided to undertake a review to look at quality of life issues within the Community Strategy. This is particularly useful in the final year of the Authority as this will enable these issues to be benchmarked for future reference. It is also an opportunity for Members to make recommendations, where appropriate, to the new Authority.

Four Review Groups have been established look at quality of life topics relevant to their ambition. The reviews will look at achievements, gaps/deficiencies in provision and areas in need of improvement.

Each review group will produce a report setting out its finding and recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

Following conclusion of the four reviews the reports will be combined to form a 'State of the Borough' report.

The final report from each review will be combined with the final reports from the other review groups to form a single State of the Borough report. This report will be a useful source of reference for the new Council and will provide a benchmark for future assessment.

Objectives of the Review

The Objectives of the Review are:

- To look at services provided by the Council and other agencies
- To highlight the areas that are working well and areas for improvement.
- To make recommendations via Cabinet to the new Council

Contribution to the Council's Ambitions and Community Outcomes

Outcomes of the Review will contribute to development of the ambition of a Strong Community and the Community outcomes of Securing quality sustainable Housing and Promoting Safer Neighbourhoods.

Process Methodology

The Review Group gathered information and evidence as follows:

- a) Through Review Group meetings held between June – October 2008
- b) Through evidence gathering and topic based presentations on:-

Crime & Disorder

Dennis Scarr, Head of Community Safety
Allan Blakemore, Community Safety Manager
Helen Dent, Anti- Social Behaviour Manager
Michael Dunn, District Manager, County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service

Community Cohesion & Local Democracy

Graham Wood, Corporate Policy and Regeneration Manager
David Anderson, Democratic Services Manager
John Stubbs, Electoral Services Manager
Sylvia Dodsworth, Tenant Participation Officer

Housing

Dianne Hedley, Housing Strategy Manager
Keith Reeve, Design and Management Manager

- c) Through research and statistics from the Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy Local Area Framework
- d) Feedback from the LSP Annual Stakeholder meeting in June 2008

Conclusions & Recommendations

CRIME & DISORDER

Conclusions

There is strong evidence of a Multi Agency Community Safety Partnership within the Borough that has delivered numerous wide-ranging initiatives and contributed to reducing Crime within the Borough.

The Borough is an area of low crime but attention is required to address priorities that have been identified by the Community Safety Partnership.

Recommendation

- 1) That the level of Community Safety activity within the Borough is maintained and priorities identified by Sedgefield Community Safety Partnership are acknowledged and considered within the development of a countywide Community Safety Partnership Strategy.

COMMUNITY COHESION

Conclusion

Community cohesion can add many benefits to the quality of life of residents and contribute to achieving strong and vibrant communities.

Within Sedgefield Borough the following methods have been utilised to strengthen community cohesion. Their continuance within the proposed Area Action Partnership structure is vital to ensure that community cohesion continues to grow.

Community Engagement

Residents have been encouraged to become involved in all aspects of the Council's services and wider quality of life issues. Tenants Groups, Residents Groups and Youth Forums have been established and are receiving ongoing support to ensure that they are successful and sustainable. Support has been given to the creation and development of community and voluntary service organisations within the Borough. An independently run Citizens Panel has been established in order to consult local residents on a wide range of issues affecting the Borough.

Participation in the democratic processes has been sought by encouraging electoral registration and voting at elections. In addition residents have been

encouraged to participate in the democratic decision making processes, particularly Area Forums and Overview & Scrutiny investigations.

Community Participation

Community Appraisals have been conducted in order to inform the future development of local communities in a way that reflects their needs and aspirations which will influence the decisions of service providers in the Borough.

The Local Improvement Programme had enabled communities to be involved and help prioritise regeneration and enhance community facilities in their localities.

Sedgefield Borough Local Strategic Partnership has been effective in developing relationships with partners and stakeholders. Their focus has been to improve the quality of life for all residents living within the Borough. Public, private and voluntary organisations agencies have been brought together to maximise their collective effectiveness in order to respond to the needs of communities.

Community Development

Capacity building within communities is a long term commitment which extends further than individual 2 or 3 year funding plans.

Appropriate and effective communication is fundamental to relay information, provide knowledge and improve confidence within communities.

Recommendations

2. That Sedgefield Borough Homes continue to involve tenants in the planning, development and monitoring of its housing services.
3. That the new unitary council continue the process of community engagement by:-
 - i. Continuing to support Community and Voluntary Service organisations financially linked to Service Level Agreements and maintain links so that they continue to receive support and advice from appropriate officers.
 - ii. Continuing to assist in the development of Youth Forums.
 - iii. Utilising the community appraisals completed in November 2008 to understand the needs and aspirations articulated by communities, relating to the gaps in service provision so that appropriate influence can be applied to service providers and attract external resources.

- iv. Continuing to engage with residents and support residents groups as part of its strategic housing function.
- v. Continuing to build upon existing relationships and partnership working that has been developed through the Borough's Local Strategic Partnership as part of the ongoing development of Area Action Partnerships.
- vi. Analysing and responding to community surveys (e.g. 2008 Place Survey) at County Division level in order to reflect and address diversities in community needs.
- vii. Continuing the progress of democratic renewal including seeking to increase voter turnout at elections and engagement with communities in democratic processes.
- viii. Continuing to communicate appropriately and effectively with local communities.

HOUSING

Conclusions

The Council and its partners have made a significant impact on reducing the number of statutory homeless applications within the Borough by focusing its Homeless Strategy on prevention and working in partnership.

There is a clear commitment to develop the provision of affordable housing within the Borough and findings from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment will provide robust evidence to developers regarding the need for affordable housing.

Decent homes standard will be achieved by 2010 for the Borough's housing stock. Following the transfer of the Borough's Housing Stock in 2009 further investment is committed for improving aids and adaptations to tenants homes.

The percentage of non-decent homes within the private sector is an area of concern and further action is required to achieve decency targets for vulnerable households within the private sector.

The sustainability of the Housing market renewal programme will reduce the number of terraced properties, remodel tenure types, created the provision of housing for sale, refurbish properties of lower value, introduce regulations of the private rented sector and has assisted residents who were to be displaced with a relocation equity loan scheme and a range of alternative options.

Recommendations

- 4 That best practice interventions to reduce statutory homelessness applications within the Borough be considered within the development of a Countywide Homelessness Strategy.
- 5 That findings from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment are acknowledged and utilised as a driver future housing strategy.
- 6 Consideration be given to commissioning a Countywide stock condition survey to assess the decency standard of Private Sector Homes.
- 7 That renewal of housing within the priority areas of Chilton West, Dean Bank, and Ferryhill Station continue within the overall Coalfield Regeneration Strategy for the new Unitary Authority.

Crime & Disorder

Key Statistics

- Overall the rate of Total Crime is 26% lower than the national average
- The Borough has below national average rates for Burglary, Vehicle Crime and Violent Crime
- During 2006/07 there was 14,905 recorded incidents of Anti Social Behaviour
- 92% of responses to the Quality of Life Survey in 2007, reported that they feel safe when in their home (day & night) and when walking during the day within their neighbourhood and local town centre.
- 56.9% respondents reported feeling safe in their neighbourhood after dark and 38.3 % safe when walking in the town centre after dark

What we know about Crime and Disorder in Sedgefield Borough

Total crime within the Borough has been reducing since the 1990's however public perception is high with regard to fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Information detailed below outlines statistical information and public perceptions of Crime & Disorder within the Borough and is categorised by the following key headings:

- Total Crime
- Burglary
- Vehicle Crime
- Violent Crime
- Anti-social behaviour and criminal damage
- Perceptions of Crime

Total Crime

The Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership's audit of crime in the Borough covering 2001-2004 reported that overall crime rates are very low, 26% lower than the national average over the three-year period. Almost a third of total crime in this period was criminal damage, with theft comprising one fifth and violent crime the next greatest area by volume. Criminal damage, which is also used as

a proxy for Anti Social Behaviour, remains greater than the national average and has a detrimental effect on residents' perception of the areas in which they live.

In addition, findings from 2006/07 recorded British Crime Survey (BCS) reported 4,818 incidents in the Borough, a 3% drop from the previous year. This equates to 54.9 recorded incidents per 1,000 population and is lower than the national average of 60 recorded incidents per 1,000 population.

Crime hotspots within the Borough are concentrated around the town centres in the main towns of Newton Aycliffe, Spennymoor, Ferryhill and Shildon. There are smaller clusters however located in areas such as Trimdon, Fishburn and Cornforth. The wards containing the highest incidence of crime in the Borough are Shafto St Marys, Ferryhill and Spennymoor.

Burglary

The Borough's dwelling burglary rate per 1,000 population in 2006/2007 was 3.1 and is lower than the national average of 5.51. Wards with the highest incidence of dwelling burglary were Ferryhill (10.11), Chilton (7.52) and Broom (4.74). The robbery rate per 1,000 population was 0.84 and is significantly lower than the national figure of 3.77 per 1,000 population.

Vehicle crime

The rate per 1,000 population for theft of a motor vehicle within the Borough was 2.43 during 2006/07 and is lower than the national average rate of 3.65. Wards with the highest incidence of vehicle theft were Byerley (7.58), Broom (3.71) and The Trimdons and Fishburn (combined wards – 3.12).

The rate of theft from a motor vehicle was 4.45, significantly lower than the national average of 9.48. Wards with the highest incidence of thefts from a vehicle include Byerley (12.14), Sunnydale (9.86) and Spennymoor (8.3). The rate of interfering with a motor vehicle was 0.72, lower than the national average of 1.29.

Violent crime

The recorded rate of Violence against a person within the Borough was 17.45 per 1,000 population to which is higher than the County Durham average of 16.72 but lower than the national average of 19.28. Wards with the highest incidence of wounding were Spennymoor, Ferryhill and Shafto St Marys. Wards with the highest incidence of common assault were Middlestone, Bishop Middleham and Cornforth, and New Trimdon and Trimdon Grange. The majority of victims of violent crime were young men aged 16-24 and victims of domestic violence.

Anti-social behaviour and criminal damage

The number of anti-social behaviour incidents recorded by Sedgefield Borough Council's neighbourhood wardens in 2006/2007 was 14,905, this equates to 170 incidents per 1,000 population and is significantly higher than the incidence of recorded crime. The most commonly reported Anti Social Behaviour types were rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour and vehicle nuisance. The Boroughs wards with the highest prevalence of reported Anti Social Behaviour were Ferryhill, Shafto St Marys and West.

Perceptions of Crime

The 2007 Quality of life Survey reported that 92% of all respondents reported feeling safe when in their own home (day & night) and when walking during the day in their local neighbourhood and local town centre.

However, 56.9% respondents reported feeling safe in their neighbourhood after dark and 38.3 % safe when walking in the town centre after dark. In addition, 68% of respondents felt that their quality of life was affected to some extent by crime or anti-social behaviour. The 2006 Best Value User Satisfaction General Survey also reported that over 40% of local residents still consider crime levels in need of reduction.

Current and Planned Activity

Sedgefield Community Safety Partnership

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a legal duty on all local authorities to consider crime and disorder implications whilst exercising their duties to do all they reasonable can to prevent Crime & Disorder in their area.

The Police & Justice Act 2006 emphasised the work of partnerships with particular reference to Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships as it was acknowledged that the responsibility to deliver crime and disorder responsibilities required more than one agency.

Within the Borough, the following responsible authorities joined forces to form the core membership of Sedgefield Community Partnership:

- Sedgefield Borough Council
- Durham County Council
- Durham Constabulary
- County Durham & Darlington Fire Rescue Authority
- Durham Police Authority
- County Durham Primary Care Trust

The Community Safety Partnership established four key aims:

- 1) *To reduce crime across the Borough, increase public confidence and help make people feel safe on the street and in their homes.*
- 2) *To reveal the extent of domestic abuse in the Borough by increasing public confidence to report incidents and by raising awareness of domestic abuse issues with the ultimate result of reducing incidents of domestic abuse.*
- 3) *To increase public reassurance, creating sustainable communities where the public feel safe, by addressing anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues.*
- 4) *To reduce the adverse impact that drugs and alcohol have on individuals and Sedgefield Borough communities.*

The Community Safety Partnership produced its Crime & Disorder Strategy covering the period 2005 – 2008. The four key aims of the Partnership were incorporated into the strategy and included targets to reduce the following types of crime: Household Burglary, Other Burglary, Theft of Pedal Cycle, Robbery, Vehicle Interference, Theft of Motor Vehicle, Theft from Motor Vehicle, Criminal Damage, Theft from a Person, Wounding and Common Assault.

Through planned multi-agency activity and partnership working, during the Strategy period the Community Safety Partnership achieved the following reductions to address Crime, Disorder and Anti-Social Behaviour issues that contribute to making the Borough a safer place:

Crime Type Figures

Criminal Damage	Down 11%
Assault without injury	Down 59%
Theft from a vehicle	Down 33%
Domestic Burglary	Down 12%
Theft of a motor vehicle	Down 27%
Theft from a person	Down 43%

Multi-agency activity has included undertaking Streetsafe Operations, introducing Anti Social Behaviour procedures, interventions to reduce Domestic and Substance Misuse and improving service delivery of CCTV and Neighbourhood Wardens.

Streetsafe Operations

Streetsafe Operations concentrate on a high visibility campaign to tackling issues of Anti-Social Behaviour, Criminality and environmental issues within hotspot areas of the Borough. Operations are intelligence led and involve partnership working between the Police, Borough Council’s Neighbourhood Wardens, Street Cleansing and Licensing teams and relevant partner agencies including the Fire Service and Residents Associations.

Operations have successfully reduced criminal activity, deliberate fires and provided cleaner streets but have also proactively built relations between the services involved and the local community.

Procedures to Manage Anti-Social Behaviour

Recorded incidents of Anti Social Behaviour to Borough Council’s Neighbourhood wardens are high and a key concern with residents of the Borough. Incident reports have identified that it is a minority of people who commit the majority of Anti Social Behaviour activity within the Borough and in most cases the Community Safety Partnership’s responsible authorities already know these people.

To control those responsible for Anti-Social Behaviour activity the Community Safety Partnership introduced the following procedures that aim to reduce anti-social behaviour within communities:-

- ***Warning Letters*** are sent to offenders following two recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour to advise them that failure to stop may result in legal action.

- **Joint visits** are undertaken by the Borough Council, Police Officers and other partnership agencies to advise offenders of the legal actions that are being considered and that evidence is being gathered.
- **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC)** is a written agreement between an offender who has been involved in Anti-Social Behaviour and partnership agencies. The contract specifies a list of acts that the individual has been involved in and which they agree not to continue, failure to comply may lead to legal action been taken.
- **Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO)** can be issued against persistent offenders and places restrictions on their behaviour. It is a criminal offence to breach and ASBO and a breach can lead to imprisonment.

This approach taken by the Community Safety Partnership aims to prevent offenders from being issued an ASBO and tackles issues at an earlier stage. Statistics have shown that this procedure is proactively managing offenders of Anti Social Behaviour. Between January 2008 – May 2008 there has been:

- 122 Warning letters have issued
- 14 Joint Visits have been undertaken
- 20 signed up Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- 8 Anti Social Behaviour Orders issued

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse occurs across society regardless of age, gender, wealth, race, sexuality and geography and can cause lasting effects for the victim. Throughout the Strategy period a multi-agency action plan was designed to reduce the incidence across the Borough and to develop an integrated approach across South West Durham. Interventions have included:

- *the appointment of a Domestic Violence Coordinator, accommodation officer, two outreach workers and female neighbourhood wardens*
- *joint training programmes across all agencies and community awareness-raising initiatives*
- *developed target-hardened safe houses with links to hostels in surrounding areas and the development of a women's centre with CVS organisations i.e. SODA and No.31*
- *the introduction of the Freedom programme to provide support for victims still within abusive relationships and child counselling.*



Poster to raise awareness of Domestic Violence

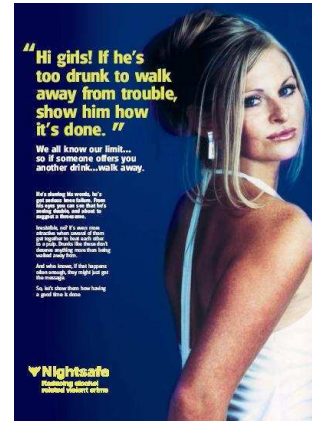
Substance Misuse

The Community Safety Partnership's Substance Misuse sub-group has delivered a multi-agency action plan designed to reduce substance misuse across the Borough. Key interventions have included the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, Drugs into Treatment, Nightsafe and Walk Away campaigns.

The Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy aims to

- Reduce the harm caused by alcohol to individuals and their families.
- Reduce the alcohol related crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour.
- Reduce the cost to society associated with alcohol misuse.

The Nightsafe and Walkaway campaigns included displaying posters in the South of County Durham and aimed at reducing alcohol related violent crime and encouraging people to know their limits and walk away.



Nightsafe poster

The Drug & Alcohol Action team work in partnership to reduce the supply of illegal drugs, improve treatment services for both alcohol and drug addiction and provide education to all residents of the Borough. Local initiatives within the Borough have included the High Street Project in Spennymoor and the dedicated young people service, XS, which both involve specialist nurses and social workers to address a variety of drugs and alcohol issues.

In addition, teachers and pupils have undertaken training in drug awareness and development work with the acute sector on providing immediate support to those receiving treatment for alcohol and drug related injuries.

Neighbourhood Wardens

There are twenty Neighbourhood Wardens who provide a service that contributes to providing safer communities. The main purpose of the Neighbourhood Warden role is to improve quality of life and to promote neighbourhood renewal through a highly visible, community based service in designated areas of the Borough. The Service has a dual emphasis on community engagement and public reassurance with the authorisation of fixed penalty enforcement powers.

Neighbourhood Wardens have had an impact in terms of increasing resident satisfaction, reducing the fear of crime, particularly for older people, decline in



Neighbourhood Wardens on Patrol

overall rates of crime, perceived improvements in environmental problems and contributing to tackling anti social behaviour.

The Borough's Neighbourhood Wardens have also played a key role in supporting Community Safety Partnership initiatives and have been commended by the then Office for the Deputy Prime Minister for their efforts to reduce youth disorder and anti social behaviour by engaging local young people in a number of innovative initiatives.

CCTV

The Borough Council's Community Safety Team operates CCTV within the Borough.

CCTV activity contributes to reducing crime within the Borough. There are 109 CCTV cameras deployed throughout the Borough and together have identified 1862 incidents, of which is an increase of 202 on the previous year and during 2007-08 CCTV detection rate also increased by 12%.

CCTV detection rates across the Borough continue to improve with significant successes, Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe are the most active areas with 23% and 22% of all incidents captured.

During 2007/08, there has been an increase in CCTV capturing incidents of Criminal Damage, Anti Social Behaviour and Violent Crime and a fall in detection rates of Burglary, Substance Misuse and Theft. Falls in CCTV incident detection rates indicate success as a measure of reducing Total Crime. These findings reflect partnership working and positive outcomes from investment made in CCTV.

Where CCTV has been used as evidence, the police have reported 184 arrests within the past 12 months as a result of CCTV involvement and monitored 285 Stop & Searches that were conducted by the police. In addition, the Fire Service was alerted and responded to 9 incidents and the control centre created 27 ambulance requests for assistance.

In 2007/08 a number of improvements were undertaken to improve CCTV within the Borough. A refurbishment programme was carried out to improve the CCTV Control Centre which included an upgrade to digital video recording equipment and the construction of a new LCD monitoring wall. In addition, relocation and new installations of CCTV units took place in Chilton, Trimdon and Shildon and within three of the Council's Leisure Centres which has contributed to increasing the surveillance footprint within the Borough.

Communication

A fundamental element to reducing crime and publicising Community Safety initiatives has been the Partnership's approach to communication. High visibility campaigns have been widely promoted to publicise initiatives and include displaying posters in nightclubs and bars within the Borough and utilising the side of the Council's refuse wagons.

The partnership has also produced newsletters that include information regarding initiatives that have or are going to be undertaken, current performance and contact details for partnership authorities.

In 2007, the Community Safety Partnership launched its Stay Safe website that provides advice on Crime Prevention, Anti-Social Behaviour, Domestic Abuse, Fire Safety and Drug and Alcohol misuse. The website enables users to download information sheets and to signpost users to services and organisations.

A unique feature of the website is that it enables users to view at ward level local crime rates, contact details for their Neighbourhood Policing Teams and view Neighbourhood profiles.

The website also includes performance information, copies of strategies and posters and the latest Community Safety Partnership news.

Community Safety Partnership - Partnership Plan Priorities 2008-2011

Following a review of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 the 3-Year Audit and Strategy has been replaced by a yearly Partnership Plan. This supports the longer term vision and priorities set out in the Local Strategic Partnership Community Strategy and supports strands of County Durham's Local Area Agreement.

The Sedgefield Community Safety Partnership priorities in the Partnership Plan 2008/2011 are:

<p>The community of Sedgefield has told us that the areas of importance to it are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Anti Social BehaviourDrug useCrimeDomestic ViolenceBullyingClean streetsFacilities and Activities for young people <p>The community of Sedgefield wants to see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">More crime preventionAnti Social Behaviour being a priorityParental control	<p>The Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment shows areas of importance are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reduction in the number of offenders who re-offendNumber of young people entering the criminal justice systemProtection of those suffering Domestic AbuseRowdy and Nuisance behaviourCriminal Damage to dwellings and motor vehiclesAlcohol related bad behaviourEarly intervention in drug and alcohol misuse problemsViolence against young people and other
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Talks in schools about alcohol/smoking Prevention of under age drinking Litter problems dealt with on private land	vulnerable adults Organisational Partners want to see improvements in: Data collection Public reassurance Community involvement Skills and processes
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From the information contained within the above table the Partnerships agreed priorities for 2008/11 are:

- Domestic Abuse
- Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse
- Anti Social Behaviour including Criminal Damage
- Offending/Re-offending

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

- There is strong evidence of a Multi Agency Community Safety Partnership within the Borough that has delivered numerous wide-ranging initiatives and contributed to reducing Crime within the Borough.
- The Borough is an area of low crime but attention is required to address priorities that have been identified by the Community Safety Partnership.

Recommendation

- 1) That the level of Community Safety activity within the Borough is maintained and priorities identified by Sedgefield Community Safety Partnership are acknowledged and considered within the development of a countywide Community Safety Partnership Strategy.

Community Cohesion

Key Statistics

- 69% of respondents were satisfied with the Borough as a place to live
- 59.1% of respondents to the General Survey stated that they 'know a lot of people in their neighbourhood' and thought that 'many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted'.
- 71.49% of residents felt a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood
- The Council has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government
- Average turnout at the last Borough election was 38%

What we know about Community Cohesion within Sedgefield Borough

What is Community Cohesion?

The Department for Communities and Local Government, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Local Government Association have published the following as a definition for Community Cohesion:-

“Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.”

A cohesive community can add many benefits to the Quality of Life of residents within an area and contribute to achieving a strong community. The four key characteristics to cohesive communities include:

- A common vision and sense of belonging
- The valuing of diversity,
- Similar life opportunities for all
- Stronger positive relationships between people of different backgrounds.

Community Cohesion within Sedgefield Borough

The Vulnerable Localities Index (VLI) was introduced by the Jill Dando Institute to identify areas that have experienced community tensions or where trend information indicates continual, recurring or increasing community problems. The VLI identifies vulnerable localities through analysing information from crime and social exclusion indicators. Findings from the index identify the Borough's most vulnerable localities include the West Ward in Newton Aycliffe, Sunnydale in Shildon, Chilton and Ferryhill.

The 2007 Quality of Life Survey and 2006 Best Value General Survey included a number of questions relating to community cohesion.

The Quality of Life Survey reported that when asked about identification with place, residents felt a 'strong sense of belonging' to:-

- England (83.6%)
- Britain (80.6%)
- County Durham (73.6%)
- Their 'neighbourhood' (71.49)
- Sedgefield Borough (51.2%)

Sense of belonging tended to increase with age for example from age groups '19-29 years' (61.6%) and '75+ years'(83.4%) and also how long they had lived in the area (21 years and more 83.7%).

The General Survey identified that 69% of respondents were satisfied with the Borough as a place to live and 59.1% of respondents stated that they 'know a lot of people in their neighbourhood' and thought that 'many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted'.

When asked if their neighbourhood was a place where neighbours looked out for each other, 53.9% responded that they 'agreed' with the statement. However, only 24% of residents felt that in their neighbourhood 'residents work together to resolve problems'.

The proportion of respondents to the General Survey who agreed that the Borough is a place where people of different backgrounds get on well was 41%, worst quartile nationally. 28.8% agreed that their neighbourhood is a place where residents respect ethnic differences between people, however the majority of respondents gave 'don't know' (33.3%) responses or felt there were 'too few people in the local area' to comment (12.6%) or that 'people were of the same backgrounds' (12.3%).

The Survey also asked about problems in their areas, the top three issues were:-

- ‘parents not being made to take responsibility for the behaviour of their children’
- ‘teenagers hanging around the streets’
- ‘people not treating other people with respect and consideration’.

Parents not being made to take responsibility for the behaviour of their children’ was rated the biggest problem overall by residents of three of the five housing areas, the exceptions being ‘Rural East’ areas, where it was edged into second place behind ‘teenagers hanging around the streets’, and Newton Aycliffe, where ‘high unemployment’ was regarded as the main problem.

With regard to ‘what is in most need of improvement’ within their area, the top three responses were

- Activities for teenagers
- shopping facilities,
- level of crime
- job prospects
- clean streets

There was some variation by area as the majority view of those who lived in the Rural East was that ‘activities for teenagers’ was by far the aspect in greatest need of improvement. Those living in Shildon, Newton Aycliffe, and Spennymoor felt that ‘shopping facilities’ were of greater or equal priority. Those from Ferryhill rated ‘level of crime’ most in need of improving.

The Quality of Life survey reported that 58.5% of respondents agreed that ‘by working together people in my neighbourhood can influence decisions that affect the neighbourhood’ whilst 21.9% ‘disagreed’. Older age groups were more inclined to agree (‘45-59 year olds’ – 62.7%; ‘60-74 year olds’ – 63.5%). On an area basis, respondents living in the Rural East (68.3%) were a little more likely to agree than others.

The General Survey identified that just over half (50.5%) of all respondents ‘disagreed’ that they ‘can influence decisions affecting the local area’ and only a quarter (25%) ‘agreed’ (worst quartile nationally). Only just over a quarter (26.1%) of all respondents expressed satisfaction with ‘opportunities for participation in local decision making provided by the Council’ (third quartile nationally), and slightly fewer (15.7%) expressed ‘dissatisfaction’. The majority of respondents gave ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’ (37.4%) or ‘don’t know’ (20.7%) responses.

Satisfaction amongst those living in homes ‘rented from the Council’ was higher than amongst the sample overall (35.6% ‘satisfied’ and only 11.2% ‘dissatisfied’), reflecting the investment in tenant participation. However, the Quality of Life Survey established that half of all respondents did not know if they had a Local

Residents Association' (LRA) and this was a general finding across all five housing areas.

The Survey also reported that 21.3% of respondents were aware of the Sedgefield Borough Local Strategic Partnership and only 14.8% of respondents were aware of their local Area Forum.

Less than a quarter (21.9%) of all respondents stated they 'would like to be involved in decisions the Council makes affecting their 'local area' (worst quartile), 53.7% may want to be involved 'depending in the issue'; only 16.9% stated that they 'do not want to be involved.'

Current and Planned Activity

The Borough Council and its partners have played an active role in contributing to improving cohesive communities through:-

- Community engagement,
- Community participation and
- Community development and support.

Community Engagement

The Borough Council has encouraged residents to be involved in all aspects of the Council's services and wider quality of life issues.

This has included the establishment and ongoing support for tenants' groups, residents' groups and youth forums, supporting and working in partnership with community and voluntary organisations and the establishment of an independently run Citizens Panel.

In addition to the involvement of communities via the above means the Council has also encouraged participation in the democratic process by encouraging electoral registration and voting at various elections, participating in decision making process through its meeting structure, particularly its Area Forums and Overview & Scrutiny investigations.

Democratic Process

The 'Returning Officer' is responsible for the co-ordination and management of the electoral process within the Borough for the election of Councillors (County, Borough, Town and Parish), Members of Parliament and Members of European Parliament and also the conduct of referendums.

The total electorate within the Borough at September 2008 is 68,868 and is reviewed through an annual census and monthly rolling registration to maintain the accuracy of the Borough's Electoral register. As at September 2008, 23.6% of the electorate have nominated to vote by post.



Election count in progress

To enable the electorate to have access to voting on an election day there are 78 Polling Stations in operation within the Borough. Voter turnout from recent elections is as follows:

Parliamentary Election 2005 – 62.41%

Parliamentary Bi-election 2007 – 41.6%

Borough and Town Parish election 2007 – 38.23%

County Council election 2008 - 38.55%

Council Meetings

The conduct of Council meetings is governed by the various Acts of Parliament and other statutory regulations. Members of the public can attend any formal meeting of the Council, unless confidential or 'exempt' information is being considered. Details of meetings are posted at the Council's main offices as required by regulation.

In addition to this meetings are also advertised in the Council's community newspaper INFORM. A calendar of meetings is also available on the Council's website which has links to agendas, reports and minutes. Details of Borough Councillors, MP's, MEP's and Town and Parish Councils are also available on the website to enable members of the public to contact them for support and advice.

The Borough Council established 5 Area Forums and 3 Overview & Scrutiny Committees in June 2000 following the introduction of new decision making arrangements under the Local Government Act 2000.

Area Forums were viewed as an important part of the Council's democratic process, recognising the importance of community engagement and the need to keep local communities informed and involved. They would provide an opportunity for communities to interact with the Council on issues of local importance.

Five Area Forums were established based on the following geographical areas as follows:-

Area 1	Spennymoor and surrounding area
Area 2	West Cornforth, Bishop Middleham, Chilton and Ferryhill
Area 3	Sedgefield, Fishburn, the Trimdons, Bradbury and Mordon
Area 4	Shildon and Eldon
Area 5	Newton Aycliffe, Aycliffe Village, Middridge and Woodham

The five meetings occur on an eight weekly cycle and are held in the evening at locations within each of the areas, with meetings rotating between venues as agreed by each Forum. Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Forums are Borough Councillors. Administrative support is provided by officers from Democratic Services. Members of the public and a wide range of Council partners are invited to attend forum meetings.

Recently the Area Forums have played an important role in the process for considering applications for funding from the Local Improvement Programme.

The Government required Councils to establish Overview & Scrutiny Committees to monitor decisions taken by Cabinet, review and develop policies of the Council, monitor performance of the Council and external partners.

The LG Act 2000 allowed the co-option of lay members on to Overview & Scrutiny Committees. The Council acknowledges the voice and expertise of

its tenants and co-opted a representative from the Tenants Federation to be a Member of its Healthy Borough with strong communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The main emphasis of the work of Overview & Scrutiny Committees is through establishing Review Groups to undertake Service and Topic Based reviews on Council Services and functions. Review Groups have actively consulted with residents and users of services through questionnaires, surveys and focus group meetings to help shape and contribute to their recommendations. Topics reviewed have included Area forums, Recycling, Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme, the Provision of Affordable Housing and the Council's community Newspaper Inform.

Community and Voluntary Service Organisations (CVS)

CVS bodies play an important role in the development of community organisations through social capital interventions that can build capacity within communities. They are also useful in signposting and providing information and advice to individuals, communities, and organisations within the Borough. Sedgfield currently has 224 CVS organisations within its boundaries ranging from art clubs and partnerships to CAVOS and CAB with a wide range of specialist ability and expertise in the organisations.

CAVOS, as the local community infrastructure organisation, is a resource to be used by the CVS organisations in developing their social capital (three types of social capital exist; bonding, bridging, and linking) and, as an indirect benefit, improving community cohesion. The Borough currently has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with CAVOS to ensure capacity of community and other CVS organisations is improved. This SLA is reviewed annually and attracts a £21,000 annual contribution the organisation. If resources are no longer available for the various CVSs post LGR a significant number will face financial difficulties and fold within 3 years.

Youth Forums

The Borough Council has engaged in a number of children and young people participation programmes. This has been overseen and supported by the Local Strategic Partnership's Children and Young Peoples Participation officer who has worked with the Borough Council and other partners to improve this process and try to make it part of their culture of delivery.

Recent work with local Town and Parish Councils has seen the development, or proposed development of Youth Councils throughout the Borough. Sedgfield Town Council, recently held elections within their three schools to elect a Youth Town Council which is now up and running. Great Aycliffe, Spennymoor and Ferryhill Town Councils are also moving in this direction.

Shildon Town Council have worked closely with a local network of children's service providers (statutory, voluntary and community based) to develop an

informal Shildon Youth Forum which has been set up via young representatives from all the services in Shildon.

All of the above are building upon existing organisational young people's networks and forums that exist within the Borough including the connexions, youth service and youth engagement groups as well as the school council network, which sees every primary and secondary school in the County developing their own democratically elected school council.

The Children's agenda which is being delivered, developed and commissioned at a Borough and District level through the Local Children's Board. Future activity will be to engage with children, young people and their families through existing methods as well as setting up new models alongside input from the young people themselves.

Citizens Panel Surveys

The Borough's Citizens Panel has over 1,000 members and has been utilised as a key consultation tool on a number of issues, including the establishment of the Local Development Framework and the future approach to waste recycling. In addition, focus groups have been drawn from the Panel to assist in setting the Council Tax and developing the Council's approach to customer focus, including access issues.

Periodically the Council will survey the wider community to gather essential information on community views of quality of life in the area and satisfaction with local services. Since 2000 all Councils have been required to undertake Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys every three years. The last of these surveys (the third) was conducted in 2006, and they were subsequently replaced with the statutory Place Survey from 2008. The Council also commissioned a more detailed Quality of Life Survey through the Borough's LSP in 2007, which focused primarily on public health.

In commissioning these surveys the Council has ensured that responses can be disaggregated to local areas, so that variations in perceptions and satisfaction rates can be identified and addressed. The Council has used these surveys to improve the services it facilitates and provides, and to commission others, with partners, through the Local Strategic Partnership.

Tenant and Resident Involvement with Sedgefield Borough Council

Sedgefield Borough Council encourages and supports resident involvement. The Council's Tenant Participation Team works with tenants and residents in the Borough to provide assistance and support to ensure effective involvement.

Support is provided to the following groups:

Tenant and Resident Associations

The following are current Tenant & Resident Associations that are constituted groups affiliated to the Council.

Albert Street, Shildon	Ferryhill Station RA	St. Paul's RA, Spennymoor
Broom RA, Ferryhill	Greenways RA, Spennymoor	Sunnydale RA, Shildon
Castles RA, Ferryhill	Lakes/Ladder Centre, Ferryhill	Tudhoe RA, Spennymoor
Chilton West RA, Chilton	Linden Place RA, Newton Aycliffe	Williamfield RA, Newton Aycliffe
Dean Bank RA, Ferryhill	New Shildon RA	Woodham Way, Newton Aycliffe
Eden RA, Spennymoor	Sedgefield RA	

Sedgefield Residents Federation

The Federation is an umbrella group made up of two representatives from each residents association and other community groups in the Borough. The Federation work to improve services that impact on the quality of life of all residents of the Borough. It works with the local authority, police and other agencies to improve local services. It provides support and shares good practice between members and other Federations. Sedgefield Residents Federation was instrumental in setting up County Durham Residents Association bringing residents together prior to the creation of the new unitary authority for County Durham.

Tenants Housing Services Group

Established in 2002 this group meets monthly and are involved in monitoring the Council's Housing Service, with regard to customer satisfaction with repairs and maintenance, call out, capital improvements and housing management.

Supported Housing Consultative Forum

The forum meets quarterly to review service delivery and is made up of tenants living in Council bungalows and sheltered schemes.

The Tenant Participation Service has been awarded Charter Mark



Charter Mark Accreditation

accreditation twice for customer service excellence. It was the first Tenant Participation Service in the country to achieve this award.

From April 2009, the Tenant Participation Service will be included within the transfer of the Council's Housing Services to Sedgefield Borough Homes and will provide support to tenants and residents of Sedgefield Borough Homes. At present an

annual funding contribution of £35K from the Council's General Fund is provided support to non-tenant groups. To ensure continued engagement funding is required to be support non-tenant groups following transfer of Housing Services and Local Government Reorganisation.

Equality Standard for Local Government

The Council believes that it has a key strategic role to play with respect to equality and diversity and is committed to promoting equality of access to, and appropriate use of its services and facilities regardless of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or religious or philosophical belief.

The Equality Standard for Local Government measures the level local authorities have mainstreamed equality into service delivery and employment as an issue for all aspects of a local authority's work. There are five levels within the Equality Standard and in June 2008, Sedgefield Borough Council successfully achieved Level 3 of the Standard which demonstrates that the Council's functions and services have mainstreamed equality and diversity. The Council was the first district council within County Durham to achieve Level 3 accreditation and aims to achieve level 4 of the standard by March 2009.



Community Participation

Community Appraisals

The Borough Council have appointed RPS consultants to complete community appraisals for all of the 19 wards in the Borough of Sedgefield and aggregated up to County Divisional level to inform the future development of our local communities in a way that reflects the wishes of local communities. A report detailing findings from these appraisals is expected to be completed by Christmas 2008.

The community appraisal is designed to provide a clear understanding of the key factors affecting a community and the gaps in provision to that community. For example, services and transport, current and background economic position, community capacity, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to that community. As a result of this type of evaluation a prioritised list of what the community needs to improve its circumstances is usually provided from the consultation with residents. This set of appraisals will go much further.

The methodology ensures that not only an appropriate community appraisal in each of the Borough's wards but will provide a firm community base with the capacity to move forward and provide future sustainability. In those areas where little or no community activity is present the successful consultancy will ensure interested individuals will be brought together and empowered to work within their communities. In those areas where there is significant community engagement the consultancy will ensure that current capacity is improved and volunteers work closely with the professionals to produce their appraisals.

The completed appraisals will allow each community to access charitable and other funding sources to improve the conditions within their neighbourhood using a ranked list of local priorities. The appraisals will also supply a further check mechanism for the operation of internally resourced grant programmes like the Local Improvement Programme, but is also useful for future programmes through Durham County Council.

The Community Appraisal will leave a legacy of improved community capacity that will ensure continuous engagement with a community that understands the issues and can engage and influence the decisions of service providers in the Borough. Residents will also have a clear picture of how information has been gathered, used and analysed and therefore have full ownership of the document once produced.

Local Improvement Programme (LIP)

The Council's LIP programme has provided an opportunity to improve community assets and support community engagement in the regeneration of local areas. Community Groups, Charitable Organisations and Town and Parish Councils have proposed projects within their Local Communities to improve sites and improve the usability of community facilities and buildings across the Borough.

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

Sedgefield Borough's LSP was formed in January 2002 and is made up of an Executive Board of Members from a cross section of interests in the Borough, with a number of stakeholder groups and smaller working groups to focus on key issues. Partnership arrangements are also in place at a more local level to harness the work of community partnerships, town and parish councils.

The aim of the LSP is to improve the quality of life for all residents in the Borough with the fastest improvements being made where need is greatest, to ensure that no one in Sedgefield Borough is seriously disadvantaged by the fact of where they live.

The LSP is a means of organising the way that public, private and voluntary agencies can work together to maximise their collective effectiveness in order to respond to the needs of the communities that make up Sedgefield Borough.

Community Development & Support

Community development and support is taken seriously by the Council to ensure engagement with residents is genuine and collaborative, rather than superficial and authoritative. National Government is keen to ensure local government engages meaningfully with residents including those that are hard to reach and hear.

This is not a process that can be rushed or limited to 2 or 3 year funding plans. Engagement, if the organisation is committed to it, should be a process that is undertaken for the long-term, working in partnership with communities and their representatives as well, of course, as their elected representatives.

This means that good quality future development and support is required for those communities to be able to make a contribution. Development of individuals within communities is required and in the long term because there is a turnover of representatives, as people move on into jobs, or new homes or drop out of activity. This development will be in the form of capacity building of individuals that in turn builds social capital and indirectly improves social cohesion, and would require resources both human and financial.

Local Government Reorganisation can be looked on as an opportunity to reinforce the message that the Council wants to work with it's communities to create better places to live, work and play.

Communication

Communication is fundamentally important to relay information and providing knowledge can breed confidence within Communities. To relay key messages to communities the Council has published documents including:

Inform – is the Council's monthly Community Newspaper which aims to highlight Council issues, success stories and inform residents of what is happening within the Borough. Inform is an excellent tool to communicate with residents and enable them to feel involved with the Council. This message is

enforced by the strap line heading 'Your community newspaper from Sedgefield Borough Council' printed under the Mast head.

DL17 –aims to keep residents and members of the community informed about progress and any new initiatives or proposals regarding the Housing Market Renewal Programme within the three regeneration areas of Dean Bank, Ferryhill, Ferryhill Station and Chilton West. The first three issues included “spotlight on” and “did you know” features that focused on one of the three renewal communities and include information on the history of the area and any famous former inhabitants

Sedgefield Community Safety Partnership Newsletter – contains details of current performance, information on the types of crime that is affecting the Borough and key contact details of Members of the Partnership.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusion

Community cohesion can add many benefits to the quality of life of residents and contribute to achieving strong and vibrant communities.

Within Sedgefield Borough the following methods have been utilised to strengthen community cohesion. Their continuance within the proposed Area Action Partnership structure is vital to ensure that community cohesion continues to grow.

Community Engagement

Residents have been encouraged to become involved in all aspects of the Council's services and wider quality of life issues. Tenants Groups, Residents Groups and Youth Forums have been established and are receiving ongoing support to ensure that they are successful and sustainable. Support has been given to the creation and development of community and voluntary service organisations within the Borough. An independently run Citizens Panel has been established in order to consult local residents on a wide range of issues affecting the Borough.

Participation in the democratic processes has been sought by encouraging electoral registration and voting at elections. In addition residents have been encouraged to participate in the democratic decision making processes, particularly Area Forums and Overview & Scrutiny investigations.

Community Participation

Community Appraisals have been conducted in order to inform the future development of local communities in a way that reflects their needs and aspirations which will influence the decisions of service providers in the Borough.

The Local Improvement Programme had enabled communities to be involved and help prioritise regeneration and enhance community facilities in their localities.

Sedgefield Borough Local Strategic Partnership has been effective in developing relationships with partners and stakeholders. Their focus has been to improve the quality of life for all residents living within the Borough. Public, private and voluntary organisations agencies have been brought together to maximise their collective effectiveness in order to respond to the needs of communities.

Community Development

Capacity building within communities is a long term commitment which extends further than individual 2 or 3 year funding plans.

Appropriate and effective communication is fundamental to relay information, provide knowledge and improve confidence within communities.

Recommendations

2. That Sedgefield Borough Homes continue to involve tenants in the planning, development and monitoring of its housing services.
3. That the new unitary council continue the process of community engagement by:-
 - i. Continuing to support Community and Voluntary Service organisations financially linked to Service Level Agreements and maintain links so that they continue to receive support and advice from appropriate officers.
 - ii. Continuing to assist in the development of Youth Forums.
 - iii. Utilising the community appraisals completed in November 2008 to understand the needs and aspirations articulated by communities, relating to the gaps in service provision so that appropriate influence can be applied to service providers and attract external resources.
 - iv. Continuing to engage with residents and support residents groups as part of its strategic housing function.
 - v. Continuing to build upon existing relationships and partnership working that has been developed through the Borough's Local Strategic Partnership as part of the ongoing development of Area Action Partnerships.
 - vi. Analysing and responding to community surveys (e.g. 2008 Place Survey) at County Division level in order to reflect and address diversities in community needs.
 - vii. Continuing the progress of democratic renewal including seeking to increase voter turnout at elections and engagement with communities in democratic processes.
 - viii. Continuing to communicate appropriately and effectively with local communities.

HOUSING

Key Statistics

- ***The Borough has over 40,000 households***
- ***In 2006, the Average House Price within the Borough was £104,813***
- ***62% of the Council's Housing stock currently meets the Decent Homes Standard***
- ***The number of Statutory Homelessness applications has reduced by 89% between 2004/05 to 2007/08***
- ***The Council has given planning permission to build over 150 Affordable Housing Units within the Borough***
- ***Three former coalfield housing areas are undergoing a Housing Renewal Programme***

What we Know about housing in Sedgefield Borough?

Housing Mix

The 2001 Census assessed the type of housing within the Borough and found that terraced housing accounted for 43.54% of the total housing stock within the Borough. Semi-detached housing accounted for 34.38%, detached 16.92% and flat, maisonette or apartment type accommodation accounted for 5.1% of households. Housing tenure in 2007 was predominantly private housing (30,772) with social housing (8,647 local authority and 1,592 Registered Social Landlord) accounting for 25% of the total.

Housing Development

The Borough has averaged 238 properties being built per annum since 1991, a total of 3812 units. In 2006/07, 38.1% of new homes were built on previously developed land. This is significantly lower than the national average of 84.7% and reflects the fact the Borough has a lower stock of previously development land.

House Prices

The latest reliable data for the Borough's average house price is from 2006 and identified the average house price for the Borough as £104,813, with terraced housing £73,427 on average, semi-detached £113,864 and detached £197,017. Over the four-year period from 2002-2006 the average house price for the Borough increased by £45,520 (a 77% increase). Unquantifiable data indicates that between 2006 and 2008 house prices continued to rise but with the current downturn in the housing market it is anticipated that the average house price within the Borough may decrease.

Decent Homes Standard

The percentage of Council dwellings classified as decent in the Borough was 62% at the start of the financial year for 2008/09 11% below the national average of 73%. Data from Registered Social landlords shows that 94.5% of the 1,450 Housing Association properties in the Borough currently meet the Housing Decency Standard.

Homelessness

Sedgefield Borough's Housing Advice and Homelessness Service has made significant developments since 2005, in line with Central Government policy which has identified the need for a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Options focussed service.

The service has been reviewed and refocused and has adopted a pro active approach in order to prevent homelessness wherever possible with the introduction of various initiatives. A robust action plan has been implemented which has resulted in the number of statutory homeless applications being reduced from 822 in 2004/05 to 87 in 2007/08. This represents an 89% reduction, with statutory homeless acceptances falling from 441 in 04/05 to 47 in 07/08.

307 cases of homelessness were prevented in 2007/08 by enabling clients to remain in their existing homes or by assisting them to find alternative accommodation.

In addition, 734 clients were given housing advice over the same period, 2007/08.

Sedgefield Borough has continued to build upon this success and the figures recorded for the first two quarters of 2008/09 demonstrate a continuous improvement.

Current and Planned Activity

Current and planned activity relating to Housing within the Borough is identified through the following key areas:

- Homelessness
- Affordable Housing
- Decent Homes
- Housing Market Assessment

Homelessness

The Council's Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2007 – 2010 identifies the key aims and priorities for the service with the emphasis being on the prevention of homelessness. An action plan is included which will continue to sustain the current level of performance with a view to further improving the service.

The service is delivered through the Housing Advice and Homelessness Manager and a team of five Housing Support Officers who are based within Integrated Teams for Vulnerable Adults. The officers work alongside social workers and district nurses which enables a holistic approach to the needs of the client and therefore, providing the most appropriate course of action catered towards the individual's circumstances.

In addition, the service employs a Domestic Violence Accommodation and Support Officer who provides practical support to vulnerable people who have suffered domestic violence and wish to leave an abusive relationship. The officer is also responsible for the management of three temporary domestic violence accommodation units where those clients who require more intensive support can be housed for a transitional period until they are ready to move on to permanent accommodation. The Domestic Violence Accommodation and Support Officer will also work towards developing and formalising a sanctuary scheme to enable clients to remain safely in their own homes.

As previously stated the Council has significantly reduced the number of statutory homeless applications since 2005 and will continue to do so over the life of the strategy.

This will be done by implementing the action plan which includes:

- The establishment of protocols with Housing Management and Registered Social Landlords to reduce the number of evictions due to rent arrears or anti social behaviour and also to work together with supported accommodation providers to increase access into this sector.
- The development of a rent deposit guarantee scheme to allow greater access to the privately rented sector and also working with the holistic floating support service to enable increased tenancy sustainment.
- The production of a comprehensive housing advice and information pack including a service directory. This will be supplemented by a

homelessness prevention education pack specifically aimed at younger clients aged between 14 and 16. Educational sessions within schools are currently underway.

- The assessment of temporary accommodation against minimum standards and the reduction of the use of temporary accommodation overall by 50% by 2010.
- The establishment of a homelessness forum to ensure that the service is informed by the needs of the client.
- This work is ongoing and will continue to develop and improve the service over the next two years.

Affordable Housing

The Local Plan Policy H19 adopted by the authority in 1996 identified that the Council would encourage developers to provide an appropriate variety of house types and sizes including the provision of affordable housing where a need was demonstrated. The Council identified at this time that they would normally expect a number of affordable houses or low cost home ownership schemes to be included on sites over 75 dwellings where the local need was demonstrated.

In 2006 Planning Policy Statement 3 identified a new threshold of sites of 15 dwellings or more with a 20% affordable provision where the need was demonstrated.

Affordable Housing was the topic of an Overview and Scrutiny Review in 2006/07 and identified a number of recommendations that included providing a definition of affordable housing to give a clear steer on the development of policy on the provision and access of affordable housing within the Borough and the development of an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document.

The council has produced an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning



*Development of Affordable Housing at
Hawkeshead Place, Newton Aycliffe*

Document as part of the Borough's Local Development Framework that aims to capitalise on the opportunities to provide affordable units within the Borough.

At the end of September 2008, the Council has given commitment through planning approval for over 160 affordable housing units across the Borough. To date there has been units completed at Neville Drive, Sedgefield and progress is

being made in developing units at Hawkeshead Place, Newton Aycliffe and Chapel Row, Ferryhill. However,

it must be noted that due to a downturn in the housing market, shared ownership had become difficult to market and progress on some developments has been delayed.

The future direction of Affordable Housing is to be guided by findings from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment that has been commissioned collectively by each authority across County Durham under the Durham Housing Neighbourhood Partnership Board. These findings will set out new requirements taking into account a range of data from house prices, type, tenure and waiting list information. The outcome of this information will create a new percentage for affordable provision and provide robust evidence to developers regarding the need for affordable housing. A report is expected to be published before the end of 2008.

Housing Decency - Social Housing

In July 2008, the Borough Council balloted tenants in respect of a transfer of the Council's housing stock to Sedgefield Borough Homes. Following a 'Yes' vote of 74.2% the Council has endorsed a recommendation to proceed with the transfer to Sedgefield Borough Homes with a projected date to complete the transfer by 31st March 2009. Up until the transfer, the Council has developed a Housing Capital and Improvement programme. The aim of the programme is to ensure that decent homes standards are delivered within Value for Money budgets to which the Council has appointed a private sector partner to undertake repairs, maintenance and construction of the Council's housing stock.

Transfer of housing stock to Sedgefield Borough Homes will release an additional £65 million to improve homes to higher standard within the Borough. There will also be an increase in investment in the provision of support, aids and adaptations to tenants' homes. Within the first 5 years of Sedgefield Borough Homes, £2.75 million will be available. This funding will ensure that decent homes standard for public sector housing will be achieved by 2010.

Housing Decency- Private Sector

Building Research Establishment (BRE) undertook a commissioned stock modelling exercise covering County Durham in 2007 using intelligence from English House Condition Survey 2001 together with Census data. Findings from the exercise reported estimated that 30% of private sector homes within the Borough are non-decent and vulnerable adults occupy 10% of private sector homes.

Findings also reported that there was disparity across the County with higher predominance of non-decent homes in former coalfield areas. Within Sedgefield Borough this related to three regeneration areas of Dean Bank, Ferryhill, Ferryhill Station and Chilton West.

Housing Market Renewal

In common with other areas of County Durham, the Borough has a number of areas of older terraced private sector housing showing signs of housing market failure. These areas face the issues of low demand and obsolete housing, unbalanced tenure pattern with high levels of privately rented

properties, poor quality housing and environment often compounded by high levels of anti social behaviour.

The Borough Council has over the past three years worked with neighbouring authorities along with national and regional bodies such as the Regional Housing Board and English Partnerships, to identify, understand and address housing market fragility in the Borough with a focus in the former coalfield areas of Dean Bank, Ferryhill Station and Chilton West areas in particular.



Former Coalfield Housing in Ferryhill Station

A Master Plan has been created to enable a programme of Housing Market Renewal within the three priority communities of Dean Bank, Ferryhill, Chilton West and Ferryhill Station that are located between the Borough's major townships of Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe on the A167 corridor.

The master plan identified selective demolition, refurbishment via Group Repair Schemes, selective licensing, community engagement/neighbourhood management and the provision of new build as preferred options for all priority communities.

The programme of delivery for the Master Plan is expected to continue for over ten years and table 1 below identifies the key stages of programme delivery.

Opportunities and Proposed Intervention	Dean Bank	Chilton West	Ferryhill Station
Years 1-3 April 2007 – March 2010	Develop Praxis Site. Demolition, redevelopment and environmental improvement to Faraday and Stephenson Street. Environmental Improvements to the unnamed road along A167.	Demolition, redevelopment and environmental improvement t in the Dale Street/Oswald Terrace/Victoria/Hunter Terrace area.	Demolition of the remaining Rows excluding the South side of Haig Street. Redevelop and environmentally improve the area.
Years 3-8 April 2010 – March 2015	Demolition, redevelopment and environmental improvement to the Newton/Davy/Bessemer/Rennie Street area.	Demolition redevelopment and environmental improvement in the Dene/Raby and Ford Terrace area.	Assess Church/Charlton Street for possible future interventions.
Longer Term	Review the potential for future development land.	Review the potential for future development land.	Review the potential for future development land.

Table 1

Group Repair Schemes

Group repair schemes have been successfully completed within Eden



Terrace, Chilton and Haig Street, Ferryhill Station. The outcome of this scheme has enhanced the appearance of properties within the street through an external fabric overhaul that included repairs to roofs and chimneys, walls, doors, windows, rainwater goods and yard walls to secure the structure stability of the property.

Group Repair Scheme at Ferryhill

Selective Licensing

Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004 enables Local Authorities to apply to the Secretary of State to introduce a Selective Licensing Scheme for private landlords who let property within designated areas which are proven to suffer from low housing demand and anti social behaviour.

The Scheme will aim to improve living conditions for residents and the surrounding community by working alongside existing policies on homelessness, regeneration and anti social behaviour.

In February 2008, the Borough Council was the first district authority to receive a designation for a selective licensing scheme for selected streets in Dean Bank and West Chilton.

Community Engagement & Neighbourhood Management

Extensive community engagement has been undertaken throughout each stage of the Renewal Programme and has included consultation on the master plan, Neighbourhood renewal assessment and selective licensing. Community Engagement has also been undertaken through Public Meetings, Drop in sessions and publication of the DL17 newsletter that has kept Resident's and partners up to date with progress of the Renewal programme.

Neighbourhood management aims to narrow the gaps between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the Borough. This requires the delivery of joined up services that are specific to the needs of a Community. In October 2008, a Neighbourhood Management Centre opened in Dean Bank, Ferryhill and will focus on producing a valuable link for Communities within the priority areas and the services they require.

New Build and Housing Options

The master plan programme has enabled a joint venture agreement with Three Rivers Housing Group to build 30 units on the former Chapel Row Site at Ferryhill Station and units are to be released for Market Sale, Shared Ownership and Registered Social Landlord Social rented accommodation. The Borough Council placed priority for re-housing of residents who were being displaced through regeneration of Dean Bank and Ferryhill and provided support for a range of options to assist people to be relocated.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

- The Council and its partners have made a significant impact on reducing the number of statutory homeless applications within the Borough by focusing its Homeless Strategy on prevention and working in partnership.
- There is a clear commitment to develop the provision of affordable housing within the Borough and findings from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment will provide robust evidence to developers regarding the need for affordable housing.
- Decent homes standard will be achieved by 2010 for the Borough's housing stock. Following the transfer of the Borough's Housing Stock in 2009 further investment is committed for improving aids and adaptations to tenants homes.
- The percentage of non-decent homes within the private sector is an area of concern and further action is required to achieve decency targets for vulnerable households within the private sector.
- The sustainability of the Housing market renewal programme will reduce the number of terraced properties, remodel tenure types, create the provision of housing for sale, refurbish properties of lower value, introduce regulations of the private rented sector and has assisted residents who were to be displaced with a relocation equity loan scheme and a range of alternative options.

Recommendations

- 4) That best practice interventions to reduce statutory homelessness applications within the Borough be considered within the development of a Countywide Homelessness Strategy.
- 5) That findings from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment are acknowledged and utilised as a driver future housing strategy.
- 6) Consideration be given to commissioning a Countywide stock condition survey to assess the decency standard of Private Sector Homes.
- 7) That renewal of housing within the priority areas of Chilton West, Dean Bank, and Ferryhill Station continue within the overall Coalfield Regeneration Strategy for the new Unitary Authority.

