



Environment and Sustainable Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 January 2023

Community Action Team Update

Report of Alan Patrickson Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Electoral Division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Environment & Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESC OSC) with a summary of the work of the Community Action Team and to look at future work.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Community Action Team fulfils a valuable role improving the quality of life for residents in deprived communities, where there are a high number of private lets.
- 3 Within each project a large quantity of casework is undertaken, with enforcement powers used when required.
- 4 The team continue to work well with partners and local communities. Intelligence-led enforcement focuses on problem issues, whilst empowering the local community.

Recommendations:

- 5 Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to:
 - a) Receive and comment on the report and presentation

- b) For a further update on the Community Action Team to be included within next year's ESCOSC work programme

Background

- 6 The Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes as part of its work programme an update in relation to the Community Action Team.
- 7 This report provides members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny with an update.

Structure of the team

- 8 The Community Action Team is a small and ambitious team responsible for delivering Community Action projects within County Durham. The aim of the Community Action Team is to bring together key partners with specialist skills, as well as local residents, working proactively to tackle local housing and environmental issues.
- 9 The team currently comprise of a Team Leader (0.6 F/T equivalent), Senior Environmental Health Officer (0.6 F/T equivalent), 3 Community Action Officers (1 F/T and 2 x 0.6 equivalent) and a Public Protection Officer (F/T).
- 10 It is part of the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change Directorate, Community Protection Service, Neighbourhood Interventions Division.

Background to the team

- 11 Following a successful pilot in 2012, the CAT began operating in 2013. Since 2013, it has carried out 41 projects covering 28 locations in degraded communities across County Durham.
- 12 Each project is divided into three phases:
- Engagement, Intelligence gathering and Priority setting,
 - Action, and
 - Review, Exit and Feedback.
- 13 There are opportunities for the community to get involved through residents' engagement events, resident surgeries, and mid-action activities such as litter picks and walkabouts. Partners meet during the engagement period, carry out a walkabout of the area and, following input from the community, prioritise 3-4 issues. A strategy is put in place to carry out targeted interventions in the action period. Partners carry out a variety of interventions including weekly walkabouts of the area,

litter clearance, waste carrier licence checks, and talks to local schools. At the end of each project, an exit strategy is put in place with partners. Residents and community groups receive a feedback letter outlining the action that took place, the exit strategy, ways to contact the council and partner agencies, and a survey inviting project feedback.

- 14 Time is also allocated within each programme to review previous projects.

How the areas are identified within the County

- 15 Project locations are chosen by combining and scrutinising our Civic public health complaint data with a dataset of deprivation, empty homes, median house price and percentage private rented in receipt of housing benefit. This allows us to establish locations with greatest need.
- 16 The 2023-24 locations also included newly available antisocial behaviour data.
- 17 Some locations continue to rank highly in terms of these indicators.

The type of work undertaken with examples

- 18 The CAT carried out 6 eleven-week projects in 2021 and 2022, as well as 9 reviews of previous project areas.
- 19 In 2021 the team visited Shildon, South Moor, Dean Bank and reviewed previous projects in Crook, Eldon & Dene Valley, Ferryhill Station and Grange Villa.
- 20 In 2022 the team visited Easington Colliery, Spennymoor, Wheatley Hill and reviewed previous projects in Blackhall Colliery, Dean Bank, Horden, Shildon and South Moor. Although the review of the Horden project did not include walkabouts and casework due to the Horden Together team being in place there.
- 21 Core casework related to common issues such as rubbish accumulations and defective drainage, with open to access properties, pest issues, fly tipping, dog fouling, nuisance properties and housing disrepair also investigated.
- 22 The team carried out a total of 2145 pieces of casework in 2021 and 2022, which included follow-up and review work in previous project locations. There were a total of 1009 legal Notices served and 170 works in default required where there was non-compliance with Notices.

Table 1.1 – Types of casework in CAT project areas in 2021 and 2022

	2021	2022	Grand Total
Type of Casework			
C01 Accumulation - Agricultural		1	1
C02 Accumulation - Commercial	2	5	7
C03 Accumulation - Domestic	575	575	1150
C04 Accumulation - Advice	2	2	4
C11 Drain / Sewer Blockage / Sewerage Overflow	6	28	34
C12 Drain / Sewer / Rainwater Defect	55	72	127
C14 Drainage - Surface Water	6		6
C16 Drainage - Advice		2	2
C21 Filthy / Verminous Premises	4	6	10
C22 Pests - Rodents (NOT request for service)	10	33	43
C24 Pests - Pigeons / Other Birds	5	4	9
C31 Detrimental to the Amenity	6		6
C33 Public Health - Other	234	268	502
C34 Public Health - advice enquiry	4	3	7
H01 HHSRS	2		2
H05 Home Safety / Security	9	1	10
H11 Empty Property - Notification	10	18	28
H12 Empty Property - Open To Unauthorised Access	18	56	74
H13 Empty Property - Unsafe	1		1
H15 Empty Property - Other	26	13	39
H21 Defective / Nuisance Property	26	18	44
H23 Dangerous Structure	4	8	12
H27 Housing Other	8	1	9
H32 Advice and Guidance - Private Sector Initiatives Only		1	1
H36 Housing - Info / Advice Enquiry - Env Health Only		2	2
H40 Disrepair - Private Sector Initiatives Only	1		1
H44 Partnership Working	11		11
H46 CAT Team Housing Disrepair Proactive		1	1
X08 Referred To Other Service	2		2
Grand Total	1027	1118	2145

23 The largest category of casework continues to be rubbish accumulations in private yards, followed by drainage concerns.

- 24 The 'Public Health Other' category covers survey work, as well as a mixture of issues brought to our attention by residents and through walkabouts.
- 25 During each project partners work on a variety of issues found during the engagement period at the start of the project, through community information and identified through walkabouts.
- 26 Each project has an action plan with assigned actions. These are dependent on the project priorities, but have included bin marking, extra littering/dog fouling/ASB patrols, community litter picks, 'no dumping' posters, untidy site clearance, door knocking 'confidence' surveys, proactive property inspections, survey work, traffic surveys, Speedwatch, Public Health initiatives such as wellbeing walks and mini health checks.

How the team works with partners and other service within DCC

- 27 The team work alongside other Durham County Council teams such as Planning Officers, Private Sector Housing Officers, Selective Licensing, Neighbourhood Wardens, Clean & Green, Civic Pride, Regeneration and other Community Safety teams. External partners include the Police, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Teams and Housing Associations. As well as local Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, Resident groups and local communities. The aim of the CAT is to bring together key partners with specialist skills, as well as local residents, working proactively to tackle local housing, environmental and antisocial behaviour issues
- 28 Before each project starts, CAT officers make contact with partners and other services to get their input into the project planning and agree their participation in the project.
- 29 At the start of each project partners are invited to an initial meeting, where partner intelligence is shared and an initial walkabout where partners can view the issues of concern and start to problem solve multi-agency solutions. A partner walkabout also takes place.
- 30 Following the community engagement period, partners meet again. The findings from the engagement period are reviewed and project priorities put in place, along with an action plan for the 7-week action period. All partners are encouraged to participate in the action plan.
- 31 During the action period, partners are tasked to work on specific actions. Weekly walkabouts take place to focus on the priority issues. Resident surgeries are held to update residents on the work of the team.

- 32 A mid-action update is requested from each partner and circulated to the partner group.
- 33 At the end of the project partners come together for an exit meeting where the project is reviewed, and an exit strategy is put in place. The exit strategy tasks partners continuing to work in the area to continue to focus on the project priorities and any hot spot issues.
- 34 Approximately 6-12 months after each project is completed a review takes place. Low-key walkabouts of the focus area take place and the exit strategy is reviewed. Partners are requested to provide updates on the exit strategy actions. The findings from the review are circulated to partners.
- 35 We have continued to work with Groundwork North East and Cumbria. They are contracted to work with us during the project, then carry out 20 weeks sustainability at the end of each project. Groundwork deliver community-based events and activities, such as volunteering and training sessions. This engages local people, schools and community groups and embeds the CAT project priority topics. Previous activities have included litter picks, healthy eating sessions, bin marking, volunteer clean ups, improvement of green spaces, and youth provision. They also usually attract match funding into the area as well.

The success of the team and how performance/success is monitored

- 36 Each project has an action plan and the quantity of casework, notices and work in default is monitored. See Table 1.2.
- 37 Feedback surveys are sent to residents and landlords at the end of each project. The results are reviewed regularly.
- 38 After each project the location is revisited 6-12 months afterwards. Low key walkabouts are carried out, as well as a review of the exit strategy. The quantity of casework picked up during the reviews is usually lower than on the original project, however in some areas there is still a significant amount of casework found. See Table 1.3.
- 39 Partners continue to give positive feedback at the end of each project about the multi-agency work which has taken place, as well as suggestions for improving future projects.

Table 1.2 – Quantity of casework and legal notices in CAT project areas in 2021 and 2022

Location	Casework	Notices	Work in Default
Shildon	184	48	8
South Moor	279	94	15
Dean Bank	306	84	11
Reviews(4)/Other	258	145	31
TOTAL – 2021	1027	371	65
Easington Colliery	335	216	29
Spennymoor	188	82	13
Wheatley Hill	202	84	15
Reviews(4)/Other	393	256	48
TOTAL – 2022	1118	638	102

Table 1.3 – Comparison of casework found on the original project walkabout compared to the review walkabout and the % change by location

Review Location	Original Project Total Casework	Original Project 1 st Walkabout	Review walkabout	% Change
2021				
Crook	95	40	28	-30%
Eldon and Dene Valley	257	168	116	-31%
Ferryhill Station	207	120	31	-74%
Grange Villa	197	90	58	-36%
2022				
Blackhall Colliery	175	116	88	-24%
Dean Bank	306	126	109	-13%
Shildon	184	90	107	+19%
South Moor	279	124	62	-50%

How the work of the team is funded and levels of funding

- 40 The funding for the CAT team is part of the overall budget for Community Protection and has a small operational revenue budget which is used for promotional, educational and engagement activities. Community Protection also funds the works undertaken by Groundwork

which is designed to leave legacy improvements. The work undertaken by partner agencies will be funded by each individual service area.

Future work plans and Next Steps

- 41 The Community Action Team are due to begin their next project in Coundon from 23rd January – 9th April 2023. A new programme of locations will begin after that date.
- 42 The partnership with Groundwork North East and Cumbria has been extended into 2024, with an option to extend for a further 12 months.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable