

8 July 2015

**Update on the work of the
Community Action Team and the
use of targeted interventions**

**Joint Report of Lorraine O'Donnell Assistant Chief Executive and
Terry Collins, Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services**

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the work of the council's Community Action Team (CAT) and the use of targeted interventions.

Background

- 2 At the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 10 November 2014 an overview was provided on the Community Action Team and the use of targeted interventions covering the 2013 – 2014 programme of work. Subsequently, it was agreed by members at the meeting that an update on the work of the CAT would be provided at a future meeting of the committee. In addition, following the November meeting, members of the committee received the detail of the CAT work programme for 2015/16. It is therefore considered timely for the committee to receive a further update and arrangements have been made for the Environment Protection Manager to attend the committee meeting on the 8 July to deliver a presentation focusing on:
 - Background information on the CAT work programme for 2013-15.
 - Results of the CAT 2014-15 work programme.
 - 2014 Summer Review findings.
 - Future work.
- 3 The CAT is a small, proactive team consisting of members of the Environmental Health & Consumer Protection department who are responsible for delivering Community Action Schemes at identified locations within County Durham. They work alongside Planning officers, Housing officers, Neighbourhood Wardens, Police and Community Support Officers, and Fire and Rescue teams and with local communities. The aim of the Community Action Schemes is to bring together key partners with specialist skills, as well as local residents, to tackle local housing and environmental issues.
- 4 In February 2013 the CAT began a two-year work programme visiting identified degraded communities across County Durham. Locations were chosen geographically across the county in each of the Local Multi-

Agency Problem Solving (LMAPs) – part 2 areas, against set criteria based on health deprivation, visual environmental degradation, commercial buildings, high level of private rents and existing community groups operating within the area. Communities visited were: Coundon Grange/Eldon Lane, Murton, South Moor, New Shildon, Trimdon Station/Deaf Hill, Grange Villa, Spennymoor, Leadgate, Easington Colliery Durham City and Horden (East).

- 5 In each location an 8-10 week programme took place. Each initiative was split into three phases: Engagement/Priority setting, Action and Review, and Exit/Feedback. There were opportunities for the community to get involved through a residents’ meeting, drop-in sessions, and a community litter pick in some projects. Partners met during the engagement period, carried out a walkabout of the area and, following input from the community, prioritised 3-4 issues. A strategy was put in place to carry out targeted interventions in the action period. Partners carried out a variety of interventions including weekly, and in some locations bi-weekly, walkabouts of the area, test purchasing of alcohol, home fire safety checks, litter clearance, waste carrier licence checks, and talks to local schools. At the end of each project an exit strategy was put in place with partners. Residents and community groups received a letter outlining the action that had taken place, the exit strategy, ways to contact the council and partner agencies and a survey. A similar letter and survey was also sent to landlords.

Key findings from the 2014-2015 Programme

- 6 Core casework related to rubbish accumulations and defective drainage, with housing disrepair and open to access properties also being investigated. There were 161 legal notices served and 37 works in default were required where there was non-compliance with notices.
- 7 Table 1 – Comparison of casework in CAT project areas up to 5 April 2015

Location	Casework	Notices	Work In Default
Spennymoor	100	41	9
Leadgate	65	7	1
Easington	150	75	19
Durham City	60	1	1
Horden East	148	42	7
TOTAL - 2014-15	523	161	37

- 8 Improving housing standards and removing rubbish accumulations were identified as priority issues in all locations, with empty/derelict properties being chosen in several of the projects.
- 9 There were a number additional partner activities carried out per project which included test purchases of alcohol, mini health checks for residents, home fire safety checks, untidy sites tackled by planning colleagues, and empty homes were pursued by housing colleagues. Groundwork was also involved in working with communities to improve the immediate environment within the project area.

- 10 Throughout all the projects there was a low number of private housing cases reported, despite this being a priority in all locations. However within Durham city the team engaged with a number of student landlords and the Students Union.
- 11 Positive press articles have been published for all projects and the CAT has remained high profile in Durham County News, Buzz and member briefings.
- 12 Establishing good links with residents, businesses and community groups in each area was vital to the success of each project. Initial residents' meetings have, where possible, been linked to existing community meetings, for example PACT meetings, while drop-in sessions were linked in with local community events.
- 13 At the end of each project partners were invited to give feedback and development suggestions at the final partner meeting. The feedback received was very positive on the joint working opportunities and the specific interventions that had taken place during each project. Community engagement remains an area that could be improved; however, it was noted that many agencies find this to be a challenge in the locations chosen for the CAT projects.
- 14 The resident and landlord survey response returns continue to be low, however some useful comments were received which have helped improve the programme.

Key findings from the summer review period 2014

- 15 From 6 – 27 January 2015 the CAT undertook a period of review. Since the full programme began, 10 projects had taken place following the initial 3 pilot areas. During this review period 6 locations were chosen to look at the sustainability of the work carried out and address any ongoing issues.
- 16 In each of the 6 locations partners, elected members, and community representatives welcomed the CAT team back to the area and were keen for further action to be taken. The number of housing and environmental issues found on each review walkabout was lower in each location than the initial walkabout at the start of each original project.
- 17 Table 2 – Comparison of casework found on the original project walkabout compared to the review walkabout and the % change by location

Location	Original project 1st walkabout	Review walkabout	% Change
Spennymoor	73	36	-51%
Leadgate	35	14	-60%
Trimdon Station / Deaf Hill	64	20	-69%
West Cornforth	44	29	-34%
No Place	40	4	-90%
Murton	38	10	-74%

18 A breakdown of casework in each review area.

Location Breakdown of work	Spennymoor	Leadgate	Trimdon Station / Deaf Hill	West Cornforth	No Place	Murton
Food/Noxious Accumulations	26	5	7	10	1	6
Open Access	1	0	0	2	0	0
Drain Defects	0	0	0	6	0	0
Other CAT cases	1	0	3	0	0	1
Wardens – inert accumulations	3	4	5	6	2	2
Clean and Green	3	2	1	3	0	0
Other referrals	2	3	4	2	1	1
Total	36	14	20	29	4	10

19 The exit strategies were largely followed, however there remains a need for further monitoring of previous CAT project locations following exit.

20 Further review walkabouts are planned in July 2015 for the recent project areas.

Next Steps

21 The Community Action Team is now undertaking the finalised programme for 2015-16 and will visit ten communities over this period, which will include revisits to previous project areas where environmental degradation remains a priority issue.

22 The emphasis when choosing locations remains to focus on areas of greater need rather than following a geographical route round the county. This is due to projects in the more deprived areas of the county providing a higher caseload.

23 The revisit projects will build on the original programme and aim to target resources further e.g. interventions may focus on specific properties where there has been a history of non-compliance or the top ten landlords. In addition previous areas will be revisited during scheduled review periods.

24 The barriers identified by landlords and residents will be given further consideration and may be taken forward through a focus group which is part of the 'Environment in Community' group.

25 During the 2014 – 15 programme the CAT team made new partner links with the council's Family Link team and Groundwork North East and Cumbria. These new partner links will continue to support the CAT when working with vulnerable families in the community and enable the CAT to leave an environmental legacy as part of the exit strategy in each location.

Recommendations

- 29 Members of the Committee are asked to note information contained within the update report on the work of the CAT and the use of targeted interventions and comment accordingly.
- 30 That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a further update on the work of the Community Action Team at a future meeting.

Background Papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – None

Staffing – None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder – None

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement – None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None

Risk and Legal - None