The Neighbourhood Officer Team
The Council’s neighbourhood officer team acts as a single point of contact for residents living within Gateshead’s Bridging NewcastleGateshead (BNG) regeneration areas.

The Neighbourhood Officers work within areas that are covered by plans produced as part of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder in Gateshead: Bensham and Saltwell, Teams, Brandling and Sunderland Road. The approved plans can be viewed on either Gateshead Council’s or Bridging NewcastleGateshead’s websites.

www.gateshead.gov.uk
www.bridgingng.org.uk

The team forms an integral part of the Council’s Neighbourhood Management team within the Communities and Neighbourhoods Service. The work of the team involves the officers providing support, information, advice and guidance for residents regarding the regeneration programme and, just as importantly, the team work to tackle issues that may arise in relation to the services delivered to the whole neighbourhood, making sure the community continues to receive a quality and responsive service as the area moves through transformational change.

Activities
The team have continued to support residents throughout the property acquisition process; making sure residents are kept up to date with both the wider regeneration programme and what is happening in their immediate area.

Throughout 2008/09 the neighbourhood officers have enabled 115 property acquisitions to proceed smoothly, with direct one to one support being given to 69 residents in the Bensham & Saltwell, Teams and Brandling (North of Felling) areas helping them relocate with as little inconvenience as possible. Many of these residents have needed a high degree of handholding and in many cases daily contact has been needed and maintained.

The casework is often very sensitive and usually involves partnership working with a range of services and organisations. These have included:
- Social workers
- Occupational therapists
- Drug and alcohol workers
- Debt advisers
- Gateshead Citizens Advice Bureau
- Gateshead Probation Service
- Education welfare officers
- Private and registered social landlords
- Property management companies
- Solicitors
- Removal companies

Satisfaction with the Team’s service
In order to monitor the quality of the service provided, residents that have been relocated are offered the opportunity of completing a customer satisfaction form. A total of 69 were distributed, with 51 returned, which is a response rate of 74% with 96% stating that they were satisfied with the advice, support and information they received from the team.

Neighbourhood Officer Satisfaction 2008/09

Developing the community infrastructure
Over the last 12-18 months the Communities and Neighbourhoods Service have continued to work with and support residents living in the north of Felling and Bensham & Saltwell areas as part of the housing-led regeneration programme.
Much of this activity has been in relation to schemes improving the physical environmental within neighbourhoods. This has included improvements to the pocket parks and open spaces along Bensham Road as part of the Neighbourhood Pride programme, and the regeneration of Avondale Park.

This work helps ensure communities and residents are kept up to date with what is happening in their area, and provides them with opportunities to work with the Council on issues affecting their neighbourhood.

Street Representatives
Throughout the year the team have worked with the community seeking innovative ways to both keep residents informed and to encourage them to become stronger advocates for service improvement. This work has resulted in over 116 residents across the regeneration areas getting more involved in working with the Council and becoming Street Representatives.

The Street Representatives reported back on their first year of working with the Council and here are some of their comments:

"We have had a very valuable opportunity to raise areas that concern us personally in our neighbourhood and to consult with the Council and the Police. A very constructive exchange of views and information about ongoing projects" (Ravenscourt Place resident)

"I have found today's event useful as I have found out what is happening in the wider area" (Brighton Road resident)

"Today was a welcome introduction to Street representation and to gather views of local residents. I think as the process develops in time these meetings will become even more useful" (Claremont North Avenue resident)

Each Street Representative has been given a file containing useful information regarding the Council including relevant contact numbers as well as details on the Council’s regeneration plans. The first collective meeting of the Street Representatives was held at Saltwell Towers on 25th March 2009 and was a great success.
Supporting communities through regeneration
Throughout 2008 the Neighbourhood Officer team have continued to work with housing associations, The Gateshead Housing Company, Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire & Rescue community safety section and many other agencies to ensure they continue to understand the regeneration programme, ensuring they are kept up to date on the acquisition programme and service delivery in the area.

The team have also worked closely with B.M.E. communities ensuring that they are provided with the opportunity to participate and get involved with what is happening in their area, including the promotion of the Street Representatives programme. This led to Gateshead Muslim Society offering to take a proactive role in the informal supervision and management of the newly regenerated Avondale Park, volunteering to become key holders.

The “Welcome to Gateshead” DVD includes contributions from many sections of the community, including the Jewish Community Council of Gateshead and Gateshead Muslim Society.

“Welcome to Gateshead”
Two Tyneside-based media companies have been commissioned to work with the Council on a project to produce an interactive DVD and booklet, that will help develop the level of understanding around the regeneration of communities, underlining the change process and how the community is informed, involved and supported.

In common with other Housing Market Renewal programmes, the programme in NewcastleGateshead has not always benefited from a positive media image at both local and national levels. It is hoped that the DVD and the accompanying booklet will go someway to redress this apparent imbalance.

The experience of many residents affected by the Programme in Gateshead has been a positive one with favourable housing outcomes, good working relationships with the Council and a more positive outlook on the prospects for the neighbourhood.

The various stories and experiences told by local residents are also an important element of the DVD, particularly from people who have lived in the communities for a number of years. The emotional aspect of these stories will help to show how regeneration builds upon the culture and character of the neighbourhoods.

It will show how the communities have developed over time, what interventions have happened to date, how residents are supported through the process, the positive impact on local residents and the plan for the future.

Lawrie McMenemy, former Sunderland and Southampton Manager, grew up in Bensham and returned to feature on the DVD, seeing how the area was changing.

The production and distribution of this DVD, along with the booklet, are considered to be an engaging alternative to standard printed materials, not only providing accurate and authoritative information for people directly affected, but also those people looking to move into these areas, along with other interested parties and stakeholders. The film on the DVD will have a running time of around 17 minutes and the booklet will incorporate approximately 12 pages.
Urban design
The team have continued to work the Council’s regeneration staff supporting the work previously carried out by Planning Aid North East, training residents on urban design in particular in relation to Building For Life and Eco Homes standards.

Throughout 2008 the team have continued to support these residents and the training process and have sought opinion and encouraged residents from the Urban Design Reference Panel to work with Council on regenerating open spaces and keeping them up to date on the acquisition process in particular in relation to potential sites for redevelopment.

Co-ordination of Services
The Neighbourhood Officer team have continued to co-ordinate services throughout the regeneration areas, giving emphasis to co-ordination of services within the demolition sites ensuring that the sites remain secure and free from flying tipping and anti-social behaviour.

In the Sunderland Road area the team have continued to support Development and Enterprise staff targeting the “long terraces” and advising landlords to maintain and keep their empty properties secure, clean and free from debris thus ensuring that properties continue to meet the criteria linked to the Private Landlord Selective Licensing Scheme. The increase in Street Representatives in this area has helped with the monitoring and forwarding of information on empty properties. This work will continue into 2009/10.

The team have continued their work with Local Environmental Services enforcement staff, targeting specific areas and ensuring relevant enforcement action is instigated. Moving on from the good working practice developed in 2007/8 the team have continued to promote to residents - particularly the Street Representatives - who to contact with regard to fly tipping and bulky waste removal. In the Saltwell area, Hilda Street residents are working to develop their own leaflet that they want to push through neighbours’ letterboxes, to help make the local community more accountable for waste management and how they dispose of their rubbish. Their leaflet will contain basic information on collection times and dates, requesting residents to make sure they take their bin back in to the curtilage of their property on the same day as the bins are emptied. The neighbourhood officers will continue to support residents and empower them to become more active within their neighbourhoods.

Problem Solving
The neighbourhood officer team continue to play an active role supporting the joint Council/Police problem solving process using a multi agency approach to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour as well as many other community safety issues. The team work closely with both other Neighbourhood Management staff to ensure issues are tackled by relevant agencies and officers within the Council.

New partnership working opportunities
Neighbourhood Watch
The Street Representative model is to be shared with Northumbria Police and joint working has been developed in order to encourage residents and some of the existing Street Representatives to become involved in Neighbourhood Watch and more generally form better links with the Police. This work will continue throughout 2009/10 and the working model is to be rolled out into the Teams area working with the Restorative Justice Board.

Restorative Justice Board
Starting in April 2009, this joint piece of work hopes to raise the level of community engagement within the Teams area. Residents will be offered the opportunity to become Street Representatives and to act as a reference group for the Restorative Justice Board. It is the intention of the Restorative Justice Board working with Neighbourhood Management to track this piece of work, supported by Newcastle University. Over the next two years an academic paper will be produced looking at the impact of the approach taken.
The Neighbourhood Officer team working in partnership with individual agencies, such as Safer Gateshead and the Criminal Justice Board, together with organisations within, and working in conjunction with, the criminal justice system are being encouraged to engage with communities to improve levels of confidence and to deliver better resolutions to community problems.

Aspects of engagement are embedded within different Public Service Level Agreements and this encouragement although welcomed by all is not always as joined up as it might be when viewed from a resident’s perspective.

It is recognised by all parties to this project needs to improve both the quality and the coherence of engagement activities delivered by different agencies/partnerships within the same geographical area, in order to avoid duplication of effort, making such activities more productive and improve efficiency.

The project will seek to align the various public service engagement activities within the Teams area to ensure that they reinforce one another to achieve maximum positive impact.

Neighbourhood Pride
The team has continued to play a key role in developing proposals for this joint initiative with The Gateshead Housing Company. Across the Central Neighbourhood Management Area in 2008/9 nine schemes were completed across the four central wards.

The schemes ranged from improving open space to a scheme following on from the housing regeneration block improvement works on Durham Road, involved working closely with residents speaking to them about their newly improved properties and encouraging them to become Street Representatives.

Nearly 20 new Street Representatives were gained through this process as well as many more residents simply keeping in touch. A free planted hanging basket was offered to all those who took part in the process with the aim of continuing to improve the visual look of the block as well as injecting some colour along the street that is a major gateway to the centre of Gateshead.

Durham Road, where the hanging baskets will be going up in May 2009

The Neighbourhood Officers have continued to maintain a link with the primary schools in the regeneration areas and encouraged the children to maintain the improvements that were carried out last year to the open space in the Bensham & Saltwell area in particular to the pocket parks off Bensham Road. Working with Local Environmental Services the children maintain a sensory garden.

Getting in touch
Should you require any further information or advice please do not hesitate to contact

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