Community Action Scheme
Durham City
27 October – 21 December 2014

Background

The Community Action Team (CAT) tackled a range of housing and environmental problems Durham City, primarily in the Crossgate, Gilesgate and Claypath areas, from 27 October and 21 December 2014.

The aim of the programme in Durham City differed from previous projects, primarily focusing on students who were living out of university accommodation.

The CAT worked alongside both the local community and partner agencies to deal with a range of issues highlighted by students in Durham City including:

- Housing disrepair in private properties
- Empty properties – private and commercial
- Rubbish accumulation and dog dirt in yards
- Underage sale of restricted goods including cigarettes and alcohol
- Excess alcohol consumption and safety issues
- Noise issues
- Illegal sales of cheap cigarettes
- Scams such as letters, emails or text messages claiming that you have won something

During our time in Durham City, the CAT ran a number of informal drop-in sessions at the Durham Student Union which provided students with the opportunity to gain information and advice, help identify local priorities and report issues to the team.

Strategy meeting

Following a strategy meeting on Wednesday 5 November, the priorities that were agreed with partners were as follows:

- Rubbish and recycling accumulations at private and commercial properties
- Excess alcohol and associated safety issues
- Private housing and domestic safety
Drop-in sessions

Students were encouraged to attend drop-in sessions at the Durham Student Union throughout our visit to Durham City, to discuss progress and report any issues to us. Each drop-in session featured information and advice on the following topics:

- Recycling
- Home safety
- Alcohol harm reduction
- Door step crime
- Energy efficiency schemes
- Consumer rights

At the drop-in sessions, NHS health trainers were also present to offer one-to-one advice on healthy lifestyles and to carry out mini health checks which consisted of:

- Blood pressure checks
- BMI (height and weight) checks
- Brief discussions on lifestyle issues
- Information about services and support

The CAT also attended a drop-in session as part of Durham University’s Environment Week on Tuesday 18 November where students received advice from our refuse and recycling service.

Community clean up

On Wednesday 19 November, Durham University students and members of the Crossgate Community Partnership volunteered to work with Groundwork and the Clean Green team to remove litter, fly-tipping and other accumulated waste in the area around the viaduct. A further student and resident clean up took place on Saturday 6 December with the Friends of Stockton Road Cemetery.
Evaluation

At the end of the scheme, an evaluation process was implemented, seeking feedback from students and those who attended drop-in sessions, as well as producing an exit plan to continue to deal with any identified issues.

On visiting Durham City, the CAT carried out the following actions:

- **Weekly walkabouts** identified 60 issues of concern including rubbish accumulation in backyards and defective drains. These took place in the Viaduct area, Claypath and Lower Gilesgate with resident group members attending.
- **Resident groups** reported 8 issues of concern relating to rubbish accumulations and made suggestions to improve waste collection in the city.
- **In response to concerns** found during a walkabout in Claypath, 7 trade premises were checked for fire safety and waste duty of care on Wednesday 26 November as part of a joint initiative between CAT, the fire service and wardens. Advice was given to the premises visited and follow-up action will be taken on 3 of these premises.
- The three drop-in sessions saw an attendance of approximately 50 students, as well as a further 60 who attended the session as part of Durham University’s Environment Week.
- **15 people also received free health checks** as part of the drop-in sessions.
- **As part of the community clean up**, approximately 50 bags of rubbish and undergrowth were collected, as well as bulky materials such as old carpets and wood.
- **Members of our planning team and wardens** met with the new owner of the land next to Holly Street/John Street to discuss the condition of the land and work to improve this has begun.
- **Our wardens also visited residents** in Laburnum Terrace to advise on rubbish bins being left out. Since speaking to residents, an improvement in the appearance of the area has been noted.
- **Two individuals have been arrested** in relation to bike thefts, and another two people have been arrested and noise equipment seized following repeat complaints of noise nuisance.
- **Durham Constabulary** have introduced a ‘drunk and incapable’ service where if an individual has to be escorted home due to intoxication, they will receive a follow-up visit the next day to ensure they are safe.
- **Planning colleagues** have worked on six untidy sites identified through the walkabouts – including a visually untidy house, two derelict pieces of land and have contacted two agents about long-term letting boards. Information gathered about letting boards will be fed into the review of the voluntary code in March 2015. Work will continue on two sites.
- **The Highways team** have arranged for five broken drain covers found in back lanes to be replaced.
- **Feedback letters** sent to landlord of homes of multiple occupation (HMO) and non-licensable HMOs to highlight key messages from the project.
Although the CAT have moved onto another area, the residual council services and partner agencies will continue to operate in the area and the CAT have put in place the following measures to continue to work on the areas of priority:

- The Recycling Strategy team have started looking internally at locations for additional communal bins and have started on some site assessments on particular locations
- Further work will take place on the commercial premises where rubbish issues have been identified
- Plans to introduce parking restrictions to the back lanes around Hawthorn Terrace are being progressed and will be consulted on in the new year
- Following receipt of measuring unit glasses, events will be organised at the Student Union to promote responsible drinking
- Durham Constabulary have been notified of sites identified from walkabouts and will include these on their patrol beats
- Regular patrols of the private and commercial properties where rubbish and recycling accumulation is an issue will continue to be carried out by wardens
- Durham University will continue to organise an annual community clean up during their Environment Week, and further student and resident clean up events will be organised with the Friends of Stockton Road Cemetery
- Fire Service will continue to carry out free home safety checks in the area for the foreseeable future
- Durham County Council supports the introduction of an accreditation scheme for student houses in Durham City. Consultation has already taken place. Implementation of the scheme has yet to be agreed
- CAT will revisit the area in Summer 2015 to carry out a review of the project

Further information

For information on what and where the CAT are working currently, please visit our Community Action Scheme – Current Project webpage.

You can also find out what work the CAT have carried out in other areas of the county by visiting our Community Action Scheme webpage, or for more information on our pilot scheme, please visit the Community Action Pilot Scheme webpage.

Contact us

For further information on the CAT, or to report any issues of concern in your area, please e-mail us at CommunityActionTeam@durham.gov.uk or call the team on 03000 261 016.