

## Aims

- ◆ To provide a high profile accountable presence on Council estates.
- ◆ To improve the physical condition of estates through rapid responses to residents' concerns eg in relation to the environment, fencing and vandalism.
- ◆ To increase the sustainability of tenancies through a partnership approach.
- ◆ To ensure clean, attractive, safe neighbourhoods.
- ◆ To build strong links with community groups and improve the appearance of housing estates.

## Location

The resident population of North Tyneside, as measured in the 2001 Census, was 191,659. The council currently manages a portfolio of over 17,500 council houses.

In August 2000, there were 15,860 Income Support claimants within the borough, 20 per cent of those unemployed were aged 50 and over, 10 per cent had never worked and 34 per cent were long term unemployed.

This project is targeted at all estates with Council housing in the Neighbourhood Renewal area. There are no designated rural areas within North Tyneside.

## The Intervention Strategy

### Staffing

North Tyneside Council is the lead agent and the initiative is locally based within the area Housing Teams. NRF paid for the recruitment, training and employment of 10 Estate Caretakers + who work in NRF priority Wards. The new team complements the work of an existing team of eight, who work in other areas

### Funding

NRF Finance provides 58,000 per year out of a total project cost of 100,000. .

Taper funding exists until March 2005.

### Operating method

As the lead agent, North Tyneside Council, through the current process of reorganisation and realignment of services, are placing more emphasis on helping sustain local services. This

process is ongoing and where services are valued from a customer's perspective, adequate resources need to be made available to meet this need. The Estate Caretaker Plus provision in many cases is the first point of contact with our customers.

By providing a localised housing service, which includes the Estates Caretakers initiative, housing staff responsible for service delivery are constantly made aware of customers' views, expectations and needs. This has further been reinforced through several Best Value Reviews, the development of Tenant Participation strategies, as well as focus groups with tenants, which are a fundamental part of our service delivery.

Consultation with various community groups has helped influence the way housing services are delivered, and as part of a realigned housing service, it is proposed to provide a comprehensive integrated service through restructuring, and also, where necessary, through networking, acting as a signpost to other service providers.

Within this context, the Estates Caretaker + service, sets out to provide a locally accountable, high profile service:

- ◆ To respond to residents' concerns in relation to vandalism, empty properties and upkeep of the external environment and provide a handy person presence.
- ◆ To ensure that the process of moving house operates smoothly and efficiently for Council tenants.
- ◆ To act as an initial point of contact for service delivery, as well as providing services direct.
- ◆ To develop community links within designated areas of responsibility.
- ◆ To help make housing estates cleaner and safer and to enhance community pride



- ◆ They work closely with the Council's Clean Sweep and Graffiti teams.
- ◆ They change the perception of empty properties on estates – blight, neglect etc, enhancing environmental aspects of estates through internal/ external work.
- ◆ They have a 'hands on' role in promoting active participation in service delivery, and sign-posting to other services, including environment.

In addition, the scheme has the following key characteristics:

- ◆ Achieving direct flexible links into customer led requirements, made known through reporting at the Area Housing Offices.
- ◆ Continued joint training with Neighbourhood Wardens on issues specific to housing estates.
- ◆ Management of Estate Caretakers through housing team leaders offers accountability, flexibility and effectiveness through activity reports and a recently introduced customer satisfaction survey.
- ◆ Tackling specific personal and home based issues, involving new and vulnerable tenants and their homes.
- ◆ A customised response based on local issues in specific areas.

## Achievements of the Intervention

Outcomes monitored include:

- ◆ Reduction in void properties
- ◆ Reduced rent loss
- ◆ Increased tenant satisfaction
- ◆ Reductions in crime, juvenile disorder and anti-social behaviour
- ◆ Increase in vulnerable tenancies sustained.

Customer satisfaction through individual testimonies and Area Housing Offices highlights the value of this high profile service within communities. They have identified the importance of the caretakers as being innovative and flexible in their approach, and have used them to identified gaps in mainline service provision.

Positive outcomes of the intervention have included:

- ◆ Increased confidence in community with Council's ability to tackle environmental and housing issues



# Estate Caretakers +

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### NRF Priority:

Environment, Housing, Health, Crime

### NRF Authority:

North Tyneside

### NRF Funding Level:

£58,000 per year out of a total project cost of 100,000

PTO for additional information

**Lead Agent:**

North Tyneside Council Housing Service

**Main Partners:**

Local Community Groups, Northumbria Police, North Tyneside Council's Clean Sweep and Graffiti teams

**Location:**

This project is targeted at all estates in the North Tyneside Neighbourhood Renewal areas with Council housing.

**Main achievements:**

Outcomes monitored include:

Reduction in void properties

Reduced rent loss

Increased tenant satisfaction

Reductions in crime, juvenile disorder and anti-social behaviour

Increase in vulnerable tenancies sustained

- ◆ Increase in referrals to other Council sections and police
- ◆ Immediate response rates
- ◆ Upkeep of void properties externally, improving first time acceptances of tenancies.
- ◆ Targeting areas where youths gather and removing graffiti and litter etc;
- ◆ Building bridges between Council tenants and other residents.
- ◆ Encouraging tenants to keep gardens tidy.
- ◆ Improving communication between different departments ie; street lighting, highways and repairs.
- ◆ Liaison with community and school caretakers in the area to solve problems together.
- ◆ Responses from residents by telephone or in person thanking them for helping. The project offers opportunities for local employment.

**Mainstreaming Strategy**

Restructuring of the Housing Service will identify individual patches, and their Estate Caretaker requirements.

By realigning and restructuring service delivery, which makes sense from a customer's perspective, other mainstream services will be required to adapt and develop to meet local community needs.

This is part of the development of a Community Led Service philosophy within North Tyneside. In addition, through various focus groups, consultation exercises and Best Value Reviews relating to Housing service delivery, it is apparent that local services delivered locally are valued by our customers.

The project seeks to address priorities within the local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy's strategic theme – Improving the Quality of Housing and Neighbourhoods. Related themes and goals include

- ◆ ensure clean, attractive and safe neighbourhoods
- ◆ increase the stability of neighbourhoods by helping vulnerable people to sustain tenancies.

It is linked to the following ODPM NRF floor targets:

PSA1 "to raise the levels of social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and regional prosperity to promote better policy, integration nationally, regionally and locally."

PSA7 "by 2010, bring all social housing into decent condition with most of the improvement taking place in deprived area...".

The main opportunity for mainstreaming centres around the potential to review the local authority's mainstream repair budget and opportunities to vire funding for Estate Caretaker activity. This has yet to be agreed or approved.

**Learning Curve**

Tenants value a local, accountable, responsive service. The NRF funding has allowed the service, and its customers, to identify gaps in main line provision which can be addressed through corporate and inter-agency working.

The service needs to be flexible to adapt to the various local requirements of our customers and our estates, constant feedback will allow services to be modified, developed and enhanced as the project develops. This has been achieved through ensuring that job descriptions are broad and open to local prioritization.

**Key Lessons**

The Estate Caretakers + programme is firmly embedded into the North Tyneside Council restructuring and review process and has support at all levels. It has also been able to evidence how it has improved service provision and how it will be able to impact on this in the future. This is likely to be fundamental to the sustainability and future mainstreaming of the programme.

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