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WAITING LIST FOR COUNCIL HOUSES AS SOUTH KESSOCK HERALDS COMMUNITY REGENERATION

Interest in living in South Kessock, Inverness, has been revived as the result of multi-agency activity - to the extent that there is now a significant waiting list for a council house in the area. Over the past year, the number of empty (or void) houses in the 490-council house estate has been cut from 64 to 27 and five of these are currently on offer to prospective tenants.

And there are now 198 people on the waiting list for a council house at South Kessock and a further 121 tenants want to transfer to the area.

Brian Cain, chairman of the South Kessock Residents' Association, said: "No one is pretending that trouble does not still exist in South Kessock, but there is no doubt that residents are much less tolerant to anti-social behaviour and are prepared to root out troublemakers. Crime levels are dropping, confidence is growing and as I walk about

our streets I detect a feelgood factor about the place. The statistics speak for themselves. People now want to come here."

In a bid to reverse a trend of anti-social behaviour and spiralling council house voids, a community base has been created at Craigton Avenue, South Kessock. This is home to housing officers, a health visitor, school nurse, community police officers and the Residents' Association.

It is now very well established and is the focal point for community interest.

At this time last year, an open day was organised to promote South Kessock as a desirable place to live and a showhouse was established to demonstrate the accommodation available.

There was an excellent turn out and the agencies believe this has helped the community to turn the corner. Another open day will be held on Friday (8 August), when the focus will be more on the services that are available at the community house on Craigton Avenue.

Local Highland Councillor Peter Corbett recognises that the situation was bleak one year ago with more than 60 houses lying unoccupied.

He said: "Thanks to the presence of agencies such as housing, social work, health, police and employment and a lot of hard graft, we have managed to instil greater confidence in the area. You just need to walk around the streets and talk to the residents to sense the improvements. A year ago you could not have forecast we would have a waiting list for a council house in the area. This just shows the progress we have made. We are all very keen to firmly establish South Kessock as a desirable place to live and bring up your family."

Chief Superintendent Bruce Duncan, Head of Operations with the Northern Constabulary said: "The regeneration of South Kessock proves that partnership working benefits those at both ends of the social scale. By working together with the community, crime levels are reducing and police accessibility has proved extremely worthwhile. OPERATION EAGLE which targeted crime in the area, was embraced by the community who wanted to live in a safe environment and the fact that there is now a waiting list for people to return to the area is sound testament to the work that all agencies have been involved in, in the past year."

Day to day issues are dealt with by a multi-agency group meeting at the Craigton Avenue office. Issues are forwarded to the Merkinch Working Group for action.

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Notes to Editor:

The Merkinch Working Group was established in June, 1997 to consider a co-ordinated approach to a number of issues facing the Merkinch area, including safety, security, the environment, void properties, and other housing related matters.

The Group was reconstituted in August 2000 to continue to look at ways of improving the quality of life in the South Kessock/Merkinch area and has met approximately every six to eight weeks since then.

Membership comprises: Councillor MacRae (the Chairman), Provost Smith and Councillors Corbett, Munro, Donald and Cumming. Representatives from Northern Constabulary also attend meetings of the Group, together with the Area Manager and officials from Corporate Services, Housing, Social Work, Planning and Development, Community Education and TEC Services.