
**NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11**

I am pleased to again present the Annual Report of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of the Committee. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank all the Members for their contribution to the work of the Committee and attendance at meetings, with particular thanks to those Members who have participated in Scrutiny Reviews. Their support to the scrutiny process is invaluable and the work of the Committee would not have been as effective without their support and commitment over the last year. I would like to acknowledge the effort and the help of the Officers, particularly our Lead Officer, Ian Thompson, Assistant Director of Environmental Services. A special thanks is also extended to Councillor Dixon, the Cabinet Member with the Neighbourhood Services and Community Services portfolio for his continued support. I would also like to thank Claire Hutton, Democratic Officer for all her help and support.

Over the last year the Committee has scrutinised and challenged in a number of areas within our remit and details of these are briefly set out at the end of my report but I would like to focus on some of the areas which we have been heavily involved in this year and which are worthy of particular mention.

Street Scene – Following on from the work that we had undertaken last year in relation to street scene we have continued to monitor the service and undertaken a number of task and finish review groups focussing on weed killing and assisted refuse collection and fly tipping..

As part of our work on the services provided by Street Scene we have received an update in relation to the enforcement action taken since the implementation of the Dog Control Orders Regulations 2006, which were implemented by this Authority on 12th April, 2010.

We have also continued to monitor the actions and targets contained within the Anti Litter Initiative Campaign Action Plan and the progress that has been made to date in relation to the recommendations of the review. It is pleasing to note that since the inception of the initiative the Council has received a high amount of publicity cumulating in this Authority featuring prominently on ITV's Tonight programme broadcasted on 9th September, 2010, and the ongoing enforcement around litter and fly tipping. Linked to this piece of work we have received an update on chewing gum removal within the Town Centre and its resource implications.

Following the regular update reports we receive on the services provided by Street Scene we were pleased to be informed that the overall performance of Street Scene has continued to move in a positive direction from both residents satisfaction with services and actual performance on the ground.

Albert Hill Fire – Following the fire that occurred at Albert Hill on 8th July, 2010, Scrutiny received an informative presentation from a number of representatives from the Local Authority, Environment Agency, Fire Services and the Health and Safety Executive who each gave us an

overview on their roles and responsibilities in the incident and the lessons they have learned. We have continued to monitor the work the agencies have undertaken to regulate activities at the premises and we were particularly encouraged with the improvements made in procedures which have led to the development of a protocol that should not allow for any agency concerned to declare a tactical (Silver) level incident, which in turn would result in structured and timely communication with all those affected by the event.

Healthy Lives for Children and Young People Living in County Durham and Darlington –

We were involved in a joint piece of work with all Scrutiny Committees in relation to scrutinising elements of the Director of Public Health's Annual Report entitled 'Healthier Lives for Children and Young People Living in County Durham and Darlington'. This work was a 'first' for Darlington both in terms of cross-cutting scrutiny working at its best and in scrutinising and challenging key messages and outcomes of a partner organisation.

The area of work Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee focussed on was in relation to drug and alcohol misuse at a community/neighbourhood level with the aim of investigating how this Scrutiny Committee can build resilience in neighbourhoods to prevent and divert young people from misusing drugs/alcohol. From the work the Group had undertaken, we fully supported the proposed actions to improve the delivery of Targeted Youth Support (TYS) in Darlington in sharing the responsibility for this work and creating more efficient meeting structures in the Borough. At the six monthly update we were pleased to note that the proposals of the TYS had been agreed by the Children's Trust and that from October, 2010 weekly multi-agency TYS meetings have taken place, rotating across the three geographical areas of Darlington.

Medium Term Financial Plan – We have given a great deal of consideration to the financial position and the pressures facing the Council over the next few years and have scrutinised the draft Medium Term Financial Plan and the impact of the proposals relevant to this Scrutiny Committee which were in relation to the reduction in the Anti-Social Behaviour Service, a significant reduction in the operational delivery of and partnership support to the Community Safety Partnership and reductions and efficiencies within Street Scene services. All Scrutiny Committees have assisted with the budgetary process by holding special meetings to consider those elements of the proposals which were within their remits and to make recommendations to Cabinet. Scrutiny did have concerns and regrets at the proposals within its remit with particular regard to the Anti-Social Behaviour and Street Scene Services but will continue to monitor the impact on services and performance.

Enhanced Handyperson Service – Following the work that we had undertaken in relation to the Enhanced Handyperson Service and the recommendations we formulated, we have received an update on the service and the recommendations that were endorsed and it was pleasing to note that the majority of recommendations have been considered and implemented and we feel that it is a positive and highly successful service.

Other Areas -

Community Safety Plan 2008/11 – As part of our continuing monitoring role, we have received regular update reports on the delivery of the Borough's Community Safety Plan 2008/11 and the targets contained within Darlington's Local Area Agreement. From these updates we were pleased to note that there has been a reduction in the number of crimes that had been recorded by the Police in Darlington and that the majority of indicators remained on target. We have also

continued to monitor the key challenges and priorities for the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Private Sector Renewal Strategy – We have continued to monitor the progress and actions contained within the Private Sector Renewal Housing Renewal Strategy, which aims to provide a framework to deliver consumer choice, promote healthy living by improving conditions across the Borough and also contributes to One Darlington Perfectly Placed by creating a safe environment and protecting vulnerable. We were delighted with the progress that has been made across all of the 14 key areas within the Strategy.

Compass Choice Base Lettings Policy Review – We welcomed the opportunity to be informed of the proposed changes to the Compass Choice Based Lettings allocation policy, which will be implemented in conjunction with our Tees valley partners this month. We were particularly encouraged with the proposed changes to people leaving the HM Forces being awarded priority band 1.

Annual Report to Tenants and Tenant Board Performance – Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to comment on the draft Annual Report that was sent to all tenants in November, 2010, following the new regulator that came into force from 1st April, 2010. We have also received regular updates in relation to the work that has been undertaken by the Tenants Board

Service Planning and Service Plan Performance – Following the management re-structure, Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee is now responsible for scrutinising and monitoring the two service plans that fall within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee including those elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy ‘One Darlington : Perfectly Placed’.

Councillor Mrs. Doris Jones
on behalf of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee