
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

1. I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of that Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers, in particular Ian Thompson, Assistant Director Environmental Services who is the Lead Officer of this Scrutiny Committee and Bill Westland, Assistant Director of Public Protection who was the Lead Officer for the first half of the year. Can I also thank Allison Carling the Democratic Support Officer, all the Members of this Scrutiny Committee, and in particular those Members who have participated in the Reviews throughout the year. I would also like to thank Councillor Dixon, the Cabinet Member with the Neighbourhood Services and Community Services portfolio for his continued support.
2. With regard to a Policy Review Group for 2007/08, this Scrutiny Committee undertook its major Review in relation to Flooding and their final report with recommendations was presented to this Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 17th December, 2007. Task and Finish Review Groups included CCTV in Bus Shelters. Further details on the remit and outcome of these Reviews are detailed below. We have also continued to monitor progress on past Reviews including the Joint Review on Gully Cleaning.
3. We have seen great changes in the way that Street Scene Services have been delivered in Darlington and we congratulate Street Scene on the effort that has been made to date to make it a success, since its implementation in July 2006 which saw new ways of working which have created an area based approach, team delivery, seven-day working, community engagement and an integrated approach with a new culture. The changes to the service have not been without their difficulties but these are being overcome and this can be reflected by the financial efficiency savings that have been gained amounting to £140,000 in 2007 and a further £160,000 has been identified for 2008/09. There are future challenges for Street Scene ahead and these include to continue to deliver year on year improvements and further savings; the extended growing season which continues to put pressure on resources; the new waste contract which will be implemented in April, 2009; looking at new funding opportunities; and the implementation of new technologies for vehicle tracking, anti social behaviour and mobile working. Throughout all these changes and challenges this Scrutiny will continue to monitor the progress made and any shortfalls will be scrutinised further.
4. As part of our monitoring role we have continued to examine the Service Plans under the control of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee being Building Services, Environmental Services, Housing Benefits and Housing Services. Members now receive a summary of performance at the end of each quarter 2007/08 which clearly highlights overall performance against targets and are still also able to view all source data on *Performance Plus*. It is the intention of this Scrutiny Committee to set up task and finish groups, as necessary, to scrutinise performance in identified services and/or for individual performance indicators.

5. At a Climate Change Event held on 5th July, 2007, to which all Scrutiny Committees were invited, areas for consideration by each Committee were considered to reduce the effects of Climate Change. Following that event, all Scrutiny Committees were tasked with examining these areas further and their findings would feed into the Action Plan for the Darlington and Tees Valley Climate Change Strategies.

The particular area that our Members wished to give consideration to was fuel poverty and following a presentation by the Housing Strategy and Renewal Manager on energy efficiency and the range of energy efficiency measures currently available in Darlington, supported by government grants, we agreed five recommendations to feed into the Climate Change Action Plan. These recommendations aim to improve energy efficiency and in turn reduce the effects of global warming and reducing levels of CO2 emissions by 2008/12. Cabinet at their meeting held on 18th March, 2008 agreed to all the Scrutiny's recommendations as part of the Action plan .

6. Following approval by Council in July, 2007 to revised Cabinet portfolios, this Scrutiny Committee now has Housing included in its remit. With this in mind, Members were keen to embrace their new responsibilities and received a presentation from the Assistant Director of Housing to give Members an overview of the services provided by Housing Services. The presentation outlined the key officers and their service areas of Housing Estates, Tenancy Services, Warden Services, Supporting People, Housing Benefits and Housing Strategy and Renewal and gave full details of those service areas. We were particularly interested in issues around Anti-social behaviour, the future of Neighbourhood Houses and Residents Associations and the Warden Service in relation to Sheltered Housing Schemes, and will be addressing these issues during the forthcoming Municipal Year.

We also considered the draft Supporting People Commissioning Strategy jointly with Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee and agreed to jointly monitor the progress of the Strategy.

7. This Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the progress being made on the implementation of Darlington's Crime, Disorder and Substance Misuse Reduction Strategy and the national priorities set by government which include vehicle crime, violent crime, theft, criminal damage, burglary. In addition we also monitor performance against the local priorities relating to tackling anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse and aim to increase the number of people in drug treatment.
8. As part of the Council's commitment to improving the way that it engages with the people it services, a series of Talking Together Events have been held across the Borough. These events provide an excellent form of community engagement, focused on reaching those who would not normally turn up for a formal meeting. Delivery of these events is supported by the involvement of our partners and recent events have proved to be a great success, the more successful being the events that have had a main focus for discussion. Two rounds of Talking Together have been held and our Scrutiny have been consulted on these events and we have given some good suggestions for improving future events.

9. We continue to monitor the impact of the recent introduction of the Gambling Act 2005 and our responsibilities under that Act and the Licensing Act 2003.
10. We also continue to monitor the number of racial incidents reported to the Housing Division and whether these incidents have been upheld in accordance with Best Value Performance Indicator 164.
11. Other areas of work undertaken by this Scrutiny during the Municipal Year 2006/07 are detailed at **Appendix 1**.
12. Our main Review for this Municipal Year has been on Flooding, particularly in relation to the events recently in the Borough. The Group have met on various occasions, met with officers in the various service areas and during these meetings Members have addressed the recent flooding in the Town Centre resulting from the excess surface water caused by the exceptional amount of rainfall over a short period of time; how this Council dealt with the flooding and what procedures are in place for such events; gully cleaning and the programme for gully cleansing; and the role of Northumbrian Water in the whole process. The Group also met with representatives from Northumbrian Water Limited and then visited the Call Centre at Pity Me, Durham.

Following extensive investigations, the Group presented their findings and recommendations to all Scrutiny Members and the nine recommendations were approved and forwarded for Cabinet approval. Cabinet agreed that six of the nine recommendations be approved and actioned by the relevant department and these were in relation to the Call Centre; servicing of the gully flusher out of hours; raising public awareness; joint working group meetings with Northumbrian Water Limited; including Northumbrian Water Limited as a statutory consultee under Planning Policy Statement 25 in relation to Development and Flood Risk; and this Scrutiny receive an update report in six months time to monitor progress of the recommendations. With regard to the two recommendations which involved additional resources, it was agreed by Cabinet that resource levels would be kept under review and make temporary adjustments to resource level as necessary. With regard to the final recommendation regarding the option of CamScan being transferred to the gully flushing team, it was agreed that the Director of Community Services with report back to this Scrutiny Committee following further investigations.

For the next Municipal Year we intend to undertake our major Review on Street Scene and will continue to monitor progress on our recommendations in relation to above.

13. The Task and Finish Review Group which investigated various issue in relation to CCTV in bus shelters and the bid awarded to the Council for illuminating, upgrading and improving security and passenger facilities at all the rural bus shelters in the Borough have continued further with their investigations, as the Group were not satisfied with the findings of the Resources Scrutiny Committee, when they were requested by this Scrutiny to examine in detail the financial implications of the delays.

Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee