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NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

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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 the opportunity to thank all the Members for their contribution to the work of this Committee, 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 in particular Ian Thompson, Assistant Director of Environmental Services, who is the Lead Officer of this Scrutiny Committee. A special thanks is also extended to Councillor Dixon, the Cabinet Member with the Neighbourhood Services and Community Services portfolio for his continued support.
2. Over the last year, as seen in the work programme (**Appendix 1**), the Committee has handled all the elements of scrutiny, including policy development, project progress, consultation and monitoring functions and studies of particular services and we have gained in experience and confidence using various techniques.
3. As a Committee, we continue to look at ways in which we can, through the Scrutiny process, contribute to the work of the Council and enable all our Members to analyse, contribute and comment on ways of developing the scrutiny process further.
4. Our Main Review for this Municipal Year has been in relation to Street Scene. We set the terms of reference for the Group and the Group have met on various occasions with officers in the various service areas who gave us a presentation in accordance with the terms of reference of this review, highlighting the performance, core principles, the hot spot areas in Darlington for dog fouling, continuous improvements, the Street Scene budget and financial implications, the number of fixed penalty notices issued and the number of Street Champions per Ward. We have also undertaken a visit to the Call Centre and the Depot to examine the Performance management information from LAGAN and the vehicle tracking system.

Linked to this Review, an interesting piece of work that we have also done was to visit a number of local supermarkets to seek resident's views on the Street Scene Service provided in Darlington. A standard questionnaire was compiled to assist with this and comments received from residents were incorporated into the questionnaires which we later analysed and meetings with appropriate officers were arranged to discuss the issues highlighted and the ways forward.

We also visited Hartlepool and Stockton Borough Councils to compare how their Street Scene services operate in comparison to Darlington's.

5. As Members will be aware, Street Scene was implemented nearly three years ago now and it was decided that they would undertake their own review to look at the Street Scene management structure and also look at the services provided and to see how they could assist in improving service performance and possible efficiencies within that area. Due to the changes to the management structure within Street Scene, the Review Group was put on hold until the changes were implemented and the Review will be ongoing into the next Municipal Year.
6. As part of our monitoring role, we have continued to examine the Service Plans under the control of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee which are Building Services, Connecting with Communities, Housing Services and Housing Benefits. We have received a summary of performance at the end of the Municipal Year 2008/09 which clearly highlighted overall performance against targets for each of these areas and it is our intention to set up Task and Finish Groups, as appropriate and necessary, in order to scrutinise performance in identified services and/or for individual performance indicators.
7. Following this authority's successful bid for funding through the Government's Rural Bus Challenge Fund, we have received regular update reports on the progress made to date in relation to the installation and the operation of the CCTV in bus shelters in rural areas of the Borough. We were pleased to see that CCTV systems have been installed in 20 bus shelters' to meet concerns raised by local residents about perceptions of safety whilst waiting for buses especially at night. However we still had concerns relating to the CCTV equipment installed at a number of bus shelters and the quality of footage from those shelters and we have continued to monitor those issues. We were particularly pleased to see that the cameras have assisted the Police to identify the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour, which meets the objective behind the bid for the funding.
8. Another success for our Scrutiny was in relation to a piece of work that we undertook in relation to vehicles for sale on the highway. A scheme was launched on 11th September, 2008 which involved placing high visibility stickers on vehicles to assist in dealing with the increasing number of cars that have been advertised for sale illegally on North Road, Darlington and also warning potential buyers that the vehicles may have been advertised illegally. Following this there has been a dramatic reduction of new vehicles being advertised for sale in that area.
9. Following a piece of work that we have previously undertaken in relation to flooding it is pleasing to see that Cabinet agreed the majority of our recommendations and work has been ongoing in delivering these recommendations and to move forward on others. We will continue to monitor progress on this.
10. Members may recall that in October, 2008, the Crime and Disorder and Children's Trust were awarded £790K over three years to support the delivery of the Governments Youth Crime Action Plan at a local level. We were enthused to see that the funding would be used to purchase a highly visible mobile unit, a Street Safe Officer, a dedicated Social Worker, a Youth Offending Officer and dedicated resources would be provided to support the delivery of initiatives on Friday and Saturday evenings, and I feel this is worth highlighting again.
11. 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 and the progress being made on the delivery of the Community Safety Plan and the targets within Darlington's Local Area Agreements, which include Domestic Abuse and Anti-Social Behaviour.

12. Mr. Hill from the Citizen's Advice Bureau has attended one of our meetings and given an informative and detailed account of the National Homelessness Advice Service and the Joint Working Agreement and Rita Taylor, Head of Service, also gave us a presentation in relation to the Darlington Youth Offending Service.
13. Another presentation which we had which I would like to particularly highlight was from Sue Johnson, Chief Executive of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services and her team on the fire at the Kings Hotel on 15th August, 2008. The presentation covered the structure of the building; the issues that arose during the event; the appliances and agencies involved and the lessons that were learnt and we found this presentation extremely interesting.
14. Other areas of work undertaken by this Scrutiny during the Municipal Year 2008/09 are Environmental Crime; Stray Dogs; Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2008-12 and Darlington's Housing Strategy 2008-12; Civil Contingencies Arrangements in Darlington and the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

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