
**NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10**

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 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 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. In addition, the Committee has undertaken reviews and contributed to a number of consultations. The Committee has also taken its meetings out into the Community of Darlington and have undertaken a visit to the Youth Offending Service.
5. The Committee links its Work Programme to the work streams of the Safer Darlington Theme Group and Greener Darlington Theme Group under the Sustainable Community Strategy: One Darlington: Perfectly Placed and scrutinises the indicators contained within the Local Area Agreement which falls within the Committees remit.
6. In addition to our regular consideration of the Work Programme, we have undertaken a brainstorming session which enabled us to highlight further items to the Work Programme. David Goodchild, Policy Adviser, also attended the session and gave us a presentation and overview of our relevant Performance Indicators.
7. Following on from the work we did last year in relation to Street Scene, it became clear to us that to enable a full and comprehensive review of the services to be undertaken, a longer period was required to conclude the review and it was agreed that our Review could be extended into this Municipal Year. We re-affirmed the membership of the Review Group and its terms of reference and agreed to focus on supporting and promoting the Street Scene 'Anti Litter Initiative Campaign', which was being re-

launched. We felt this was an ideal opportunity for our Review Group to be involved with the campaign and engage with stakeholders and the community to provide positive outcomes. The Group met formally on four occasions, focusing mainly on monitoring and updating the Anti Litter Initiative Action Plan and the Lead Officers responsible for the delivery of actions were interviewed and questioned by the Group to ensure that the actions were effective and achievable.

8. Linked to this Review, I arranged an award ceremony for the Mayor to congratulate a pupil from Mount Pleasant Primary School for his work that he does for his school and community in relation to litter picking. I was delighted to see that he was awarded the Young Citizen of the Year at the 'Best of Darlington Awards'.
9. From the work this Review Group has undertaken, we were satisfied with the Anti Litter Initiative Action Plan that has been compiled and the targets and work contained within it, we also feel that it is a positive and highly successful piece of work. The Committee have endorsed the recommendations, which have been forwarded to the relevant officers for their action and we will continue to monitor the campaign.
10. As Members will be aware, Street Scene was implemented nearly four years ago now and a number of changes have been introduced to Street Scene, which has improved service delivery. Due to the continuous changes within Street Scene, the Committee feel that this will be an on-going Review for the foreseeable future.
11. Following concerns from a Ward Member in relation to the provision of street lighting within his ward, we established a joint Task and Finish Review Group with Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee. The Group met with Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director of Highways and Engineering and explored the duty of highway authority in relation to street lighting, the criteria for providing new street lighting within existing revenue and capital budgets, procedures in place for prioritising capital budgets available for street lighting and future provision of street lighting and the Carbon Management Agenda. From the work the Group has undertaken, Members were satisfied that the policy and criteria were satisfactory and that no further work was required.
12. A further piece of work that we undertaken has been in relation to the Handyperson's Services. We established a Task and Finish Review Group to examine the Handypersons Service and scrutinise the proposed changes to the service specification. The Group met on two occasions with Alan, Glew, Housing Strategy and Renewals Manager and explored the Darlington Handyperson Service Specification and the Home Safety Checklist for older people for care and repair use. From the work the Group has undertaken we were satisfied with the changes to the Handypersons Service specification and how it meets the needs of its clients. We also feel that it is a positive and highly successful service, although we did make a number of recommendations to improve the Home Safety Checklist which have been endorsed by Scrutiny and forwarded to the relevant Officer.
13. Another success for our Scrutiny Committee was in relation to a piece of work that we have previously undertaken in relation to flooding. We have received a number of updates on the progress in delivering the recommendations from this Scrutiny Committee and we were delighted to see the progress and the improvements that have already been made and the dedication of the staff. A double shift has been deployed on gully services

from September 2008 through to the Summer of 2009 and additional resources have been allocated within Street Scene to the gully cleansing programme to ensure that actual gullies against target rises to between 90-95 per cent over the next six months and thereafter sustained. I would particularly like to highlight that the overall percentage of gullies cleansed for the year was 78 per cent, which showed the positive outcomes of the Review.

14. Following a recent meeting of the Monitoring and Co-Ordination Group where the Locality Director of Public Health, submitted the Director of Public Health's Annual Report entitled 'Healthier Lives for Children and Young People living in County Durham and Darlington' I and the other Scrutiny Chairs have identified areas within that report which we felt would be beneficial for our individual Scrutiny Committees to undertake a piece of work into. This Scrutiny Committee have established a Review Group to scrutinise what the Council and its Partners are doing to reduce drug and alcohol misuse at a neighbourhood level to achieve healthier lives for children and young people in Darlington and the initial areas that we are intending to consider are in relation to targeted youth support, scrutinising the 'Treatment Plan' and sponsoring a 'Mapping exercise' for information sharing.
15. 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 2009/10 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.
16. In addition to the Service Plans we have also received a breakdown of performance data for a number of indicators in the Safer Communities, Building Services and Housing Services Service Plans, which were NI16, NI17, NI32, LI2100 and NI187. To assist us in facilitating our ongoing review of Street Scene, we also received performance data for NI1956 and NI196.
17. Linked to this piece of work, we agreed to monitor indicator LI2100 'the completion of urgent repairs in Government timescales' and we also established a Task and Finish Review Group to examine indicator NI187 'tackling fuel poverty'. We met with Alan Glew, Housing Strategy and Renewals to establish further information on why Darlington does not seem to be performing well compared to other Tees Valley Authorities and to seek further information on what advice and assistance was offered to residents in relation to fuel poverty. We were pleased with the explanation Mr. Glew gave to us and I agreed to do a mystery shopping exercise to establish how accessible the service was for residents, which I was also happy with the results.
18. We have also continued to monitor the Borough's Community Safety Plan 2008/11 and the targets contained within Darlington's Local Area Agreement. We were delighted to note that there has been a nine per cent reduction compared to the same period in 2008 in the number of crimes that had been recorded by the Police in Darlington and for the rolling twelve months up to the 31st December, 2009 crime has reduced by two per cent compared to the same period in 2007/08, however, Domestic Burglary and Robbery

remained key challenges for the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). We were pleased to be informed that a Group has been established by the CDRP to address the issues around serious acquisitive crime.

19. Following the introduction of the 2002 Homelessness Act, which required all Local Authorities to complete a review on homelessness and develop an appropriate strategy and action plan, we were delighted to receive a revised copy of the Homelessness Strategy for this Authority to cover the period 2010-2015. The development of the Strategy has been co-ordinated by the Local Authority but has been supported by a Steering Group with representation from the public, private and voluntary sector. It is pleasing to note that, as an Authority we are meeting or exceeding all Government targets relating to homelessness prevention and that the Housing Options Team have consistently achieved top quartile performance nationally in relation to homelessness preventions.
20. In relation to the Governments vision of ending rough sleeping by 2012 and we were particularly pleased to note that Darlington had already achieved this target in 2006. Successful joint agency initiatives such as 'Below Zero' have been established which provide guaranteed temporary accommodation for any homeless person should the external temperature fall below zero degrees on any given night in Darlington.
21. The Borough Solicitor attended one of our meetings and gave an informative presentation on the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 and its implications for the Committee. The regulations recommend the establishment of a Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee, the aim of which is to enhance the existing partnership arrangements, by developing a clear structure for overseeing and reviewing the delivery of joint responses on community safety. As part of the presentation reference was made to the Committee's existing powers, together with the new powers, which came into force on 30th April, 2009. Particular reference was made to the Community Call for Action, which also came into force in April, 2009, and gave Councillors the right to raise matters of local concern with their Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee then decides whether to use their powers to investigate further.
22. As a Committee we were given the opportunity to feed our comments into the consultation of Darlington Compact. The Darlington Compact is an agreement between the public and third sectors about how to work together effectively to deliver the best possible outcomes for Darlington. The preparation of the draft Compact was led by eVOLution with support from council officers. We made a number of recommendations, which were considered by Cabinet.
23. Following a request received from the Chief Executive of the Durham Police Authority, to co-opt a representative of the Police Authority, Mr. Tony Thompson, onto this Scrutiny Committee. We agreed to appoint Mr. Thompson as a co-optee, in accordance with the Regulations, and we look forward to him attending and contributing to future meetings of our Committee.
24. We have welcomed the opportunity to be informed of the current work of the Greener Darlington Theme Group and the Safer Darlington Theme Group.

25. Other areas of work undertaken by this Scrutiny during the Municipal Year 2009/10 are the Review of the Reward and Recognition Scheme, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Delivery Framework, Jontek, the Victim Support Service and the Community Survey Results 2009.

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