
OVERVIEW OF CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under my Consumer and Environmental Services Portfolio:

(a) Waste Management

The works to upgrade the civic amenity site have commenced. The enlarged and improved site should open in the first week of December. There will be facilities for recycling a large range of materials and the improved recycling performance of the site (22% to around 55%) will contribute to the Council's recycling and landfill diversion targets.

A new recycling promotion has been launched. Called Message In A Bottle the scheme encourages people to put their name and telephone number in a bottle, which they put out for recycling in the green box. Each week one winner will be chosen at random and win £50. The scheme is being run jointly with the other four Tees Valley authorities. At the end of the twelve-week promotion one winner will be drawn and will win a holiday to the value of around £3,000. There is no cost to the Councils – the scheme was a winning bid to DEFRA for pilots to examine the role of incentive schemes to increase recycling.

(b) Markets

The exterior of the market building has been re-painted. A French Market was held on the weekend of 22 and 23 October. It was well attended despite poor weather.

(c) Licensing

The drive to attract relevant premises to apply for new licences under the new Licensing Act has been successful. Well over 90% of the premises requiring a licence in Darlington have made application. The remainder are now being encouraged to do so.

The Licensing section has worked hard to achieve this, and I would like to use this report to thank staff involved.

(d) Trading Standards

The annual electric blanket safety test initiative was run from 24 to 26 October 2005. The scheme is targeted at the elderly. Typically 50% of tested blankets are unsafe. The event was hosted by Age Concern; with the Energy Saving Trust NE present to giving energy saving advice, and the Fire Authority with free smoke alarms.

(e) **Environmental Health**

In partnership with the other Tees Valley Authorities Darlington has been successful in a competitive bid to the Food Standards Agency for £450,000 to run an initiative designed to prepare catering businesses to comply with new European food hygiene legislation.

(f) **Darlington Register Office – Civil Partnerships**

Darlington has recently been inspected by General Register Office as to how prepared it is for service delivery changes arising from the Civil Modernisation Project. The inspection included Civil Partnership Registration; Web-enabled Births and Death Registrations; and a Web-enabled Marriage Notice System.

Darlington scored ‘A’s and ‘B’s in all categories and is currently on schedule to implement all three modernisation changes. The Inspector concluded, inter alia, :-

‘Darlington is making excellent progress in preparing for the changes...’ Progress on civil partnerships has been further helped by the experience Darlington has gained in delivering commitment ceremonies. This currently places Darlington 5th in England and Wales in terms of the number of ceremonies... ..’

I would like to thank all those involved in the Civil Modernisation Project. The Register Office staff have worked hard over recent months to ensure that Darlington is prepared for the implementation of Civil Partnerships.

In terms of Civil Partnerships (legal recognition for same-sex couples), couples can, commencing on 5th December, 2005, give notice of their intention to register at the Register Office, and, after 15 clear days notice, register their civil partnership in front of the registrar and two witnesses.

Any couple that registers a Civil Partnership will have the same rights as a married couple in areas such as tax, social security, inheritance and workplace benefits.

2. I have attended the following meetings in respect of my Consumer and Environmental Services Portfolio:

- (a) PPCP scrutiny meeting - 11th October.
- (b) Joint Special Social Affairs and Health and Public Protection and Community Partnerships Scrutiny Committee - 21st September.
- (c) Darlington Environmental Forum – 26th September.
- (d) Darlington Public Protection Forum – 13th September.
- (e) Training on the Gambling Act – 16th September.
- (f) Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority meetings - 22nd September, 31st October, 17th November
- (g) North East Fire and Rescue Regional Management Board – 4th November
- (h) Briefing meetings with various Directors and Assistant Directors
- (i) Citizenship Ceremony – 8th November

Councillor Steve Harker
Consumer and Environmental Services Portfolio