
**OVERVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND
COMMUNITY SAFETY PORTFOLIO**

Purpose of Report

1. The following were the main areas of work under my Community and Public Protection Portfolio:

Audit Commission Assessment of Housing Benefits

2. The Audit Commission have recently published its annual report of how each Council's Housing Benefits Service has performed. For the 5th consecutive year, the Housing Benefits Service in Darlington has been confirmed as providing the highest rated, 'excellent' service for its residents. Each year the Audit Commission undertakes an assessment of every Housing Benefits service, against the Department for Works and Pensions' (DWP) Performance Standards. The Audit Commission gathered information from a range of sources including:

- a self-assessment and evidence provided by the Council
- Best Value Performance Indicators and performance measures
- Discussions with Senior Officers in the Council
- The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's CPA report for the previous year.

The assessment looked at performance against 4 different themes:

- Claims administration – how quickly and accurately the Council processes claims for benefit.
- Security – the work undertaken by the Council to deter and investigate benefit fraud.
- User focus – the quality of front-line services delivered to customers.
- Resource arrangement – how the Council performs in relation to strategic management, value for money and assurance.

Each area was scored as a maximum 4, "excellent" by the Audit Commission. This achievement underlines the continuing hard work and commitment by Housing staff to ensure Darlington's Benefits Service is amongst the best. It also recognises the importance of how an efficiently run and highly performing Benefits Service can contribute to reducing poverty amongst its citizens and perverting homelessness.

Housing Benefits Customer Satisfaction 2007

3. A recent customer survey undertaken by Housing Benefits has revealed important levels of customer satisfaction with the service, with overall satisfaction with the service at its highest level of 85%. Since 2000, the Housing Benefits section has undertaken regular surveys with its customer to measure levels of satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. The survey asks a range of questions about the service covering the following areas:

- Accessing the service.
- Visiting the Benefits office.
- Telephoning the service.
- The staff.
- The forms and letters.
- How quickly claims are processed.

In each area, satisfaction levels have improved since the last survey in 2006.

- Satisfaction with the way in which customers can get in touch with the service improved from 77% in 2006 to 88% in 2007, the highest level of satisfaction achieved to date.
- Satisfaction with visiting the Benefits office improved from 79% in 2006 to 86% in 2007, the highest level of satisfaction achieved to date.
- Satisfaction with the telephone service improved from 66% in 2006 to 87% in 2007.
- Satisfaction with the staff improved from 82% in 2006 to 87% in 2007, the highest level of satisfaction achieved to date.
- Satisfaction with the forms and letters improved from 59% in 2006 to 61% in 2007.
- Satisfaction with the time taken to process claims for benefit improved from 72% in 2006 to 77% in 2007, the highest level of satisfaction achieved to date.
- Overall satisfaction with the Benefits Service improved from 80% in 2006 to 85% in 2007, the highest level of satisfaction achieved to date.

The survey also asked customers what they thought was the main area of improvement for the service. Significantly in 2006, 22% of customers said nothing needed improving, but this rose to 41% in 2007.

The survey also provided some specific areas for improvement and staff in the Benefits Section will be working with colleagues in Customer Services to implement an improvement action plan. Progress against these actions will be published for customers.

Energy Efficiency for Homeowners

4. In January 2008, a new “able to pay” energy efficiency scheme will be launched. The scheme will provide discounted energy efficiency measures for all homeowners, which includes a cavity wall insulation, loft insulation and draught proofing. The scheme represents a new partnership between Darlington Borough Council and Miller Pattisons who have a strong track record of delivering such works locally. The initial marketing and promotion of the scheme will be undertaken in January 2008 with the first works also being commissioned at that time. Homeowners are encouraged to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to save money on their household fuel bills and enjoy a warmer winter.

Enforcement/Waste

5. Four cases are currently pending court dates against businesses carrying waste and failing to have a valid waste carriers licence.
6. A prosecution is pending against a business whose double glazing waste was found at Forge Way, Darlington. Enquiries are still ongoing, although the offender has been identified and a formal prosecution is to follow.
7. A fly tip of household waste at Lingfield is currently under investigation. Evidence has been found relating to a Darlington couple and despite numerous attempts to interview them under caution, they have failed to attend. A prosecution case is currently being prepared for the fly tip itself and/or obstruction.
8. Another investigation is underway after officers discovered a fly tip at Sadberge. The waste, which includes garden waste from a gardening firm, was discovered discarded in a lay by, west of Sadberge. The prosecution file is currently being prepared against the firm for fly tipping and not having a waste carriers licence.
9. A fly tip of household waste at Stressholme Golf Course ponds is shortly to be prosecuted after an individual admitted dumping the waste under caution. A court date is to follow.

Enforcement/Dogs

10. Two prosecutions are pending under Bye-laws against owners who have allowed their dogs to roam in cemeteries.

Enforcement/Vehicles

11. A car sales trader who regularly and persistently advertised cars for sale on the highway on Whessoe Road was successfully prosecuted under the new provision in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act and was fined £500.
12. Following a number of complaints regarding cars being advertised for sale on North Road in large quantities, a full investigation was launched to trace and prosecute the trader responsible. A covert operation has so far identified one trader, who has been issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice.

Street Scene

13. Street Scene was launched on 3 July 2006 and has now been operating for 17 months. The project outcomes are now starting to be embedded and the culture of the service is moving from a reactive to a proactive service. The teams work in the five areas covering a range of skills, working across seven days, generally Monday to Saturday 6.00 am to 6.00 pm and Sunday 6.00 am to 4.00 pm.
14. The services that were included within Street Scene are:
 - (a) Refuse/recycling collection
 - (b) Grounds maintenance
 - (c) Litter/dog bins
 - (d) Street cleansing
 - (e) Bulky household waste collections
 - (f) Management of parks and open spaces
 - (g) Street care activities
 - (h) Low level highway maintenance
 - (i) Play area inspections and maintenance
15. Through Groundwork West Durham and Darlington engaging with the community on Street Scene and environmental improvement programmes, we now have in place 110 Street Champions and 10 Young Caretaker projects running with in excess of 80 young people involved. Groundwork are supporting Friends of Parks Groups, of which there are 13 with over 400 people involved.
16. In addition to the changes in service delivery, it was also identified that financial efficiencies could be gained through operating services in this way. To date, a £140,000 annual saving has been achieved with a further £160,000 identified for next year (2008/09) and finally by 2009/10 it is anticipated that the annual saving will be in the region of £500,000 per annum.
17. Satisfaction with Street Scene services continues to move in the right direction as demonstrated through the 2006 Best Value Survey and the 2007 Community Survey.
 - (a) 60% of residents thought parks have improved in the last three years. (Highest score in England). ('All Councils' mean score 20.5%, 'Unitary' mean score 23.7%).
 - (b) 77% of residents satisfied with parks.
 - (c) 67% of residents satisfied with cleanliness.

Darlington Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership

Headline Performance at November 2007

18. At November 2007, the following reductions have been made against the March 2008 targets:

Crime Type	March 2004 baseline	Target to March 2008	Latest 12 months	% Change from baseline
PSA1	6987	-21.4%	6435	-8%
Common Assault	540	-20%	238	-56%
Criminal Damage	2574	-25%	2471	-4%
Burglary	606	-25%	515	-15%
Robbery	98	-10%	74	-24%
Theft from Person	123	-10%	133	+8%
Theft from Motor Vehicle	1637	-25%	1249	-24%
Theft of Cycle	351	-25%	266	-24%
Theft of Motor Vehicle	598	-20%	418	-30%
Vehicle Interference	108	-10%	132	+22%
Wounding	352	-10%	939	+167%

Voluntary Target to March 2008

19. Following a request by the CDRP Executive, the Tasking and Coordinating Business Group was tasked with setting a 'voluntary' target to further reduce crime by March 2008.
20. As future emphasis is to be more on Prolific and other Priority Offenders and Persistent Young Offenders following the introduction of the Offender Management Unit, the proposed target is to reduce PSA1 Crime rather than specific crime types, as the emphasis will impact across all crime types.
21. Taking into account PSA 1 projections to March 2008, the proposed target is to reduce PSA 1 Crime by 10% by March 2008, taking the year to date position at September 2007 as the baseline. Should this target be achieved it would give a reduction of 14% on the 2003-04 PSA 1 baseline.
22. At November 2007, a 3.3% reduction has been made on the September 2007 baseline.

Tackling Violent Crime Programme

23. The Home Office in September 2007 awarded Darlington CDRP £50,000 for 2007/08 to deliver activity which will help reduce violent crime.

24. Following analysis of partnership data it was clear that Northgate Ward, and in particular Gladstone Street, was the area of greatest risk, in terms of Violent Crime and the Executive Board agreed the plan should focus on this area.
25. In consultation with partners and the Home Office an Action Plan of initiatives was drawn up. Initiatives include the recruitment of Taxi Marshalls, purchasing of bottle bins, metal detection wands, amnesty bins, polycarbonate glasses, the use of lollipops as people leave nightclubs and the deployment of officers with head cams and the passive drugs dog. Initiatives are currently being implemented and a full evaluation of the programme will be carried out in April 2008.

Darlington Drug and Alcohol Action Team

26. **Darlington DAAT Unit** is experiencing staffing changes as the DAAT Unit Manager has now left, but it is hoped that the new manager will join the unit in early March 2008.

Drugs

27. At the latest information date of November 2007, Darlington DAAT was maintaining its Green status with the National Treatment Agency (NTA). Performance against number into treatment was 620 which exceeds the annual LDP target by 32% and was 4% above the stretch target of 594.
28. Latest known performance information regarding retention of new clients beyond 12 weeks is 78% and this is likely to remain above the 75% target level by end March 2008.
29. Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) is continuing to operate at a green status due to meeting the DIP KPIs and also supporting a good number of clients from the Criminal Justice System into treatment to the satisfaction of the NTA.
30. **Adult Treatment Plan:** The new Adult Drug Treatment planning process to inform the 2008/09 treatment plan is reaching a critical stage and there will be a presentation and discussion of the needs analysis with all Stakeholders on the morning of 8 January 2008. These discussions will centre around the setting of objectives and priorities for commissioning and planning in 2008/09. Draft submission is due on 18 January 2008.
31. **Young People Treatment Plan:** This year the Department of Health have launched a drug and alcohol treatment plan for young people. The submission timetable for this plan is the same as for the Adult Drug Treatment Plan. In order to comply with these deadlines, DAAT planning groups have been involved in the consultation and needs analysis process and the latter is now complete. Included in the analysis are initial results from the School Norms drug and alcohol survey to identify the “social norms” of our young peoples’ behaviour in respect of drugs and alcohol. It is expected that this will inform planning and service delivery for 2008 onwards. A Stakeholder event has been set for the afternoon of 8 January when the needs analysis will be presented and discussions will take place around the setting of objectives and priorities for 2008/09.

Alcohol

32. Needs Assessment: A comprehensive alcohol assessment of problematic use was presented to the DAAT Board in December 2007. This provides a complex picture of the level of alcohol misuse across Darlington with particular reference to the very serious rate of young people admitted to hospital for alcohol-specific causes. his report is expected to inform future service planning by the DAAT and its partner agencies.
33. **Alcohol Treatment:** Darlington's revised specification for a Specialist Alcohol treatment service has been presented to the HISIG (Health Improvement and Social Inclusion Group) and other partners within the Alcohol treatment arena. The service progresses at a pace with several key position already filled and recruitment in progress for team leader. A base has been identified within a primary care setting (Blackett's surgery). A number of stakeholder events are planned as part of consultation. It is hoped that the service will become operational early 2008.

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Cabinet Member with Portfolio for
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