
**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE 2004/05**

Introduction

1. It is a pleasure to present this annual report to Council on behalf of the Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee, after what has again been a very busy and challenging Municipal Year.
2. May I firstly thank all the Members of the Committee for their increasing involvement in a number of task and finish reviews and their dedication to the overall work of the Scrutiny Committee throughout the year.
3. On behalf of the Committee I would also like to thank Neville Simpson our Lead Officer and Caroline Thomas in Democratic Services for their continuing guidance and support to the scrutiny process.

Darlington: A Breastfeeding Friendly Town

4. This project has been the major focus and most time consuming aspect of the work of the Committee this year, following the tremendous achievement of being selected as one of nine projects nationally by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to undertake an innovative action learning project in the field of health scrutiny.
5. Many lessons have been learned in undertaking this project, both good and bad, but it is clear that this issue has been raised up the local health agenda and progressed more quickly as a result of the work of the Committee and that our partners are developing a greater understanding of the role of scrutiny.
6. In focusing on the links between this project and the Community Strategy in terms of improving health and well being and promoting inclusive communities, especially in relation to children and young people and those living in the priority wards, we have made vital links to the Local Strategic Partnership and have raised the profile of scrutiny in Darlington at national events hosted by Coventry City Council and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).
7. I would especially like to thank our partners from Sure Start, the National Childbirth Trust, County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals Trust and Darlington PCT, in particular, Nonnie Crawford, Director of Public Health and Jonathan Smith, Head of Health Improvement who have both been a valuable source of support and information to the project.
8. We look forward to reporting on the conclusions of both the project and the independent evaluation in October of the new Municipal Year.

Task and Finish Review Groups

9. We have undertaken a number of task and finish reviews this year and these are detailed below: -
10. Councillors Copeland and G. B. Walker investigated the problems of delayed transfers of care from hospital, following which they have commended the enthusiasm and commitment shown by the then Social Services Department in tackling the problem of delays and maintaining extremely low and zero delays reimbursable by the Department.
11. Following on from the lead of Councillor Mrs. Scott on the Oral Health Review, we held a special meeting with the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee to discuss the future direction of this review and as a result have established the Obesity in Children Task and Finish Review to collate information on the growing problem on obesity in children, which may be used to inform a more detailed review in future.
12. Councillors Flowers, Johnson Reynolds and Richmond have continued their investigations into the new Community Pharmacy contract and have agreed to reconvene in February 2006 following the roll out of the new arrangements to review the success of its implementation.
13. All members of the Committee were involved in either the health or social care streams of the Transport Review, both of which have been put on hold to avoid duplication of effort with existing initiatives including the Transport for Health Partnership across County Durham and Darlington and the current departmental review of “in house” social care transport, into which the finding of the groups to date have been incorporated. We will continue to monitor progress in these areas.
14. In response to issues raised over certain design details of the refurbishment to flats at Mount Pleasant House, Councillors Copeland and Mrs. Scott undertook a task and finish review to examine and suggest a number of amendments to future designs. As a result, it has been agreed that all Ward Councillors will be given the opportunity to view completed work prior to tenants taking up occupation of their residence, which will allow for the continual re-evaluation of the design brief.
15. Councillors Johnson, Richmond and Mrs. Scott have also examined a number of issues arising from the new Housing Act 2004, which is one of most significant pieces of housing legislation over the past decade. We look forward to the issue of the Government guidance later in the year and taking an active part in consultations to develop the resultant Council policies and procedures.
16. The interest in Learning Disability Services continues with the recent establishment of a task and finish review to investigate new opportunities and employment prospects for people with a learning disability. This will build on the Council’s existing and successful partnerships with the Morrison’s Trust and Thorn EMI. Councillors Richmond and Flowers are taking the lead on this into the new Municipal Year and we await the findings with interest.

Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee

17. Myself, Councillors Copeland and Mrs. Scott have continued to represent Darlington on the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee which this year has scrutinised the Tees and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust's 'Advance' Proposals for the reconfiguration of mental health and learning disability services.
18. This has been a complex review within a tight timescale and has been a learning curve for both the Members and officers of the five Tees Valley Authorities involved. We will continue to develop relationships with these colleagues in reviewing other cross-boundary issues as they arise.

Consultations and Visits

19. Following recent public interest, a special meeting was held with the Chief Executive of County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals NHS to discuss the review of Haematology Services at Darlington Memorial and Bishop Auckland Hospitals. We have made some initial recommendations to the Trust and await the final decision of the Trust Board in deciding whether to pursue this matter further through a formal consultation.
20. We have continued to develop relationships with the 4 health trusts related to Darlington and have taken our meetings out into the community where possible. We held our January meeting at the newly opened West Park Hospital, following which Members received a guided tour of this 116 bed, state of the art facility for working age adults and the elderly with mental health problems.
21. A number of Members also attended the official opening of the new PCT headquarters at Dr Piper House in January, which was followed by a tour of the new walk-in centre. The new out-of-hours arrangements is an issue that we will be examining at our next meeting in July.

Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations

22. We have continued to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of our previous scrutiny reviews with some notable successes. Following the influential work of this Committee in partnership with our fellow Members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, we were delighted to attend the opening of the new inclusive play area at North Lodge Park back in August 2004 and we hope the children in Darlington enjoy these facilities for years to come.
23. We were also pleased to hear that the Council's Domestic Violence Policy, also implemented as a result of a scrutiny review, has been identified as an example of excellence by Darlington PCT and following Cabinet's approval has been adopted as a joint policy between the Council and the PCT.

Other Issues of Interest

24. There are a number of other areas that the Scrutiny Committee has looked at over the last Municipal Year including suicide prevention, disabled facilities grants, the Children's Pathfinder Trust, proposals for a landlord accreditation scheme and most recently the topical issue of infection control in residential, health care settings and nursing homes.

Looking Ahead...

25. Following our work this year and increased Member activity through the use of task of finish review groups, we will continue to look at ways that we can contribute to the vision for Darlington through the scrutiny process. We have identified the importance of linking our work to the Community Strategy and the themed groups of Darlington Partnership and will keep focused on these linkages and corporate priorities in determining our future work programme.
26. Our findings this year have reinforced the message that joined up thinking and multi-agency working is key to solving complex problems and we hope that the scrutiny process will add value to the issues we consider over the coming Municipal Year.

**Councillor Mrs. Marian Swift on behalf of the Social Affairs
and Health Scrutiny Committee**