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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

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**Introduction**

1. After another extremely busy year, I am delighted to present this annual report to Council on behalf of the Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee and would personally like to thank the Vice-Chair and other Members on the Committee for their ongoing support and commitment throughout this Municipal Year. I would also like to thank Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite, Cabinet Member for Adult Services for his contributions to our meetings and his support this year.
2. I would also like to thank the very able Officer support given to us over the last few years by Caroline Thomas, Democratic Support Officer, who provided this Committee with invaluable assistance prior to her leaving the Authority in November 2006. It has given me great pleasure in welcoming new Officer Support in the second half of the year, firstly to Bob Parker, for covering Jane Robinson's (nee Breheny) maternity leave as Scrutiny lead Officer, Adult Services and to Abbie Metcalfe the Committee's new Democratic Support Officer, who has enjoyed a very steep learning curve since taking up her post in late November 2006. The Committee and myself look forward to building on the positive, close working relationship we have established so far with both of these Officers.
3. This year saw the beginning of Darlington's major health scrutiny review, on Mental Health Services in Darlington, which is still in its infancy. I am sure that my colleagues on the Review Group would agree, that this is a large piece of work, which will take time and hard work to explore the sensitive issues around this topic. Our review is very timely with the recent introduction of the Mental Health Capacity Act and the up and coming changes with the Priority Trust, applying for Foundation Trust Status.
4. In addition, the Committee has undertaken some smaller reviews and contributed to a number of consultations, I would like to thank Dr Nonnie Crawford, Interim Director of Public Health, Darlington PCT for her invaluable support and wealth of knowledge and the other link NHS Trust Officers.

**A Time of Change...**

5. This year has seen the Committees involvement in a number of issues across the County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals NHS Trust area; including the transfer of stroke admissions to Bishop Auckland General Hospital, the closure of Ward 52 at Darlington Memorial Hospital and the decision to relocate the inpatient haematology services to Bishop Auckland General Hospital. We have held discussions with the Chief Executive of the Trust and continue to improve our relations and established monthly briefing sessions to share information.

6. Towards the end of this year, we have also seen the Acute Trust be authorised as a Foundation Trust and the beginning of informal consultation of the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust Durham application to become a Foundation Trust.
7. The Committee has received a number of updates from the Chief Executive of the Darlington PCT following the reconfiguration of PCTs across the Country. Although Darlington has retained our own PCT, to achieve more efficient commissioning and the required 15 per cent savings in management cost, a number of joint posts will be necessary, and County Durham PCT will have overall responsibility for commissioning and strategic planning on behalf of Darlington PCT. Members have been assured that practice based commissioning will ensure that Darlington's interests are protected and we will continue to monitor this situation as the new arrangements take effect.
8. In terms of local service provision, we have supported the PCT's proposals to change the opening hours of the Walk-in Centre, considered the results of the consultation on the re-provision of services currently provided at the Greenbank Unit and supported the respite care facilities being provided at Newton Lane. A number of Members undertook a visit to the facilities at Newton Lane and welcomed the services being provided.
9. The Committee's views were invited from the PCT and Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust on a proposal to negotiate on the future provision of respite care at St John's Mental Health Care Home, with a view to releasing funding to provide additional community support for the new flexible and responsive respite service at West Park. We have supported this proposal.
10. With our colleagues on the Public Protection and Community Partnerships Scrutiny Committee (PPCP) we considered the Council's response on Department of Health's proposed regulations relating to Smoke Free Premises and Vehicles and Underage Sale of Tobacco. The Joint Committee welcomed the proposed smoke free premises and vehicles legislation and gave its support to raising the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 18.
11. Together with our colleagues on the Environment Scrutiny Committee we have examined the consultations carried out on the draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document and supported the proposed responses to the objections, representations and comments received.
12. In July 2006, it was announced that Patient and Public Involvement Forums would be abolished and new Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) would be established. The Committee will have a clearer defined relationship with LINKs and there will also be further implications for the Local Authority. We will continue to receive information from our colleagues at the Centre of Public Scrutiny.

## **Monitoring**

13. The Committee continues to monitor the issue of infection control in health care settings in Darlington. The Acute Trust in particular, has fully implemented the 'cleanyourhands' campaign through placing alcohol gel at the point of patient care in conjunction with a large

awareness raising campaign and education programme. A three-month pilot of a further programme to reduce infection rates, called 'Saving Lives' is underway and the Committee will be kept updated on its progress.

14. Following the Director of Public Health updating Members on the progress being made following the Committee's recommendations to make Darlington: A Breastfeeding Friendly Town, the finalised action plan was launched during last year's National Breastfeeding Awareness Week from 15th to 19th May, 2006. In January 2007, we received an update from the Infant Feeding Co-ordinator on the recommendations of the Breastfeeding Review and welcomed the positive progress of the Breast Feeding Accreditation Scheme and look forward to receiving further updates.
15. We received a progress report on the changes taking place across the Home Equipment Loans service and continue to monitor the impact of this on departmental performance indicators and delayed transfers of care figures from hospital. There are still some outstanding recommendations from our original report, although it is pleasing to report that much work is ongoing to address these areas, in particular, the development of an equipment shop at the new Hundens Rehabilitation Centre.
16. We continue to monitor infection control and have received an update, in September 2006, on the Acute Trust's implementation of the Department of Health's Saving Lives Programme, which provides additional tools and techniques to reduce hospital acquired infections. It is our intention to consider the new infection control action plan in the near future.
17. In September 2006, the Committee received a revised version of the Smoke Free Darlington Action Plan following its development since our last joint meeting in September 2005 and look forward to receiving the updated version later this year.
18. Also as part of our monitoring role we have continued to examine the Service Plans under the control of the Social Affairs and Adult Services using *Performance Plus* which has enabled us to undertake better performance management. A Task and Finish Review Group was established to enable this Scrutiny to begin preparation for the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in March, 2008, and discuss how we can continue to identify any areas of concern within our control.

#### **Assessment for Improvement – The Annual Health Check**

19. As part of performance management arrangements across the NHS, the Committee has again engaged in the self-assessment process for each local NHS Trust and has provided a 'reality check' on Trust performance across 24 core standards.
20. This year the Committee has split into four separate groups and agreed some common standards in relation to patient focus, accessible and responsive care and public health to inform our contribution to each Trusts final declaration of compliance for 2006/07. Successful meetings have been held, together with very useful visits to the North East Ambulance Trust HQ and Darlington PCT, Dr Piper House, to meet with the Complaints Officers. The Committee will be meeting in the beginning of April to finalise the

responses.

### **Task and Finish Review Groups**

21. We have undertaken four very different Task and Finish Reviews this year and I would like to thank Councillors Copeland, Flowers, Holmes, Johnson, Nutt, Reynolds, Richmond and Mrs. Scott for their continual involvement and commitment to these Reviews.
22. A letter was sent targeted at employers in Darlington with 20 or more employees, highlighting the work of the Advance Employment Project and outlining the business case for supporting people with learning disabilities, following the successful work of the employment opportunities for people with a learning disability Task and Finish Review Group.
23. Following the work of the Smoking in Sheltered Housing Task and Finish Review Group, a letter was sent on behalf of Darlington Borough Council as landlords, asking residents and users of sheltered housing schemes to refrain from smoking in the communal areas for the benefit of other residents, staff and the wider community. The Task and Finish Group also recommended that the implications of the forthcoming changes to legislation regulating smoking in public places be explained to residents and support offered to any residents who may wish to stop smoking via the Primary Care Trust's Smoking Cessation Service.
24. The Stroke Association have assisted the Stroke Symptoms Task and Finish Review Group, with their work to promote stroke symptoms in Darlington, with their intention to produce a stroke symptoms information card, to avoid any duplication. The Group has also worked closely with Darlington PCT regarding the wording and distribution of the card. Work is continuing in respect of costings and funding for the card, although, it is envisaged that this Task and Finish Group will complete their findings in the very near future.
25. Most recently, and following a request from Darlington PCT for us to consider the draft Darlington PCT Nursing Strategy, a Task and Finish Group was established to consider the document in full detail with the assistance of Linda Bailes, Head of Nursing, Darlington PCT. In light of the Groups comments and the imminent restructuring, the launch of the Strategy has been postponed, and thanks were expressed for their comments.

### **Health Scrutiny Training**

26. As part of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Health Scrutiny Support Programme, we have taken advantage of five days complimentary training and support for health scrutiny and have held sessions on Scoping Mental Health and Well Being Review Group, Developing relationships with new NHS bodies after reconfiguration, Foundations Trusts, Mainstreaming Health Scrutiny, to latter two sessions were open to all Members of the Council.

### **Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee**

27. I would like to thank Councillors Copeland and Mrs Scott for their regular attendance at the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, over the last year the Joint Committee has been examining the implications of the White Paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say – A*

*New Direction for Community Services* and the future of the services across the Tees Valley.

28. The Joint Committee has agreed that eight principles identified by the National Leadership Partnership Network are absolutely key to the process of identifying future proposals to moving Health Services in the Tees Valley forward. Those being; Safe, accessible, efficient, equitable, effective, reliable, timely and patient centred. It is my intention to apply those principles in the future works undertaken by this Committee.

### **Looking Ahead...**

29. We have used the progress in Darlington in relation to the *Choosing Health* agenda and the latest White Paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say – A New Direction for Community Services* to inform our Review choice and work programme for the coming Municipal Year and will continue to look at ways in which scrutiny can contribute to the vision for Darlington.
30. In the new Municipal Year, Darlington will take up the position of Chair of the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee and will respond to the Priority Trust's consultation on its application to become a Foundation Trust.

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