
OVERVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken :-
 - (a) **Work Programme 2011/12** – We have given consideration to and discussed our proposed work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year and, in doing so, we have taken into account the reduced resources available within the Authority and ensured that, in recommending our work programme to Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, that any work we undertake will have demonstrable outcomes and contribute to the work of the Council and its strategic aims and objectives. As in previous years we will continue to monitor the services of Street Scene in particular the litter initiative project and will try to assist in engaging with the local community and involving local community groups. In addition to this we will also focus on the Medium Term Financial Plan and the impacts it will have on the remit of this Committee.
 - (b) **Annual Reports to Tenants** – The Vice Chair of the Tenants Board gave us an overview of the role of the Tenants Board and the work that they have undertaken and also presented the Housing Services Annual Report that will be sent to all Council tenants in October, 2011.
 - (c) **Impact of the Housing Benefit Reforms** – We received a comprehensive overview of the reforms to the Housing Benefit scheme that have been introduced in April, 2011, together with future planned reforms and their impacts on affected residents. The purpose of the reforms is to reduce the cost of the scheme nationally, improve the working incentives of the scheme and achieve the Government objective of ‘making work pay’, reduce the complexity of the scheme and also pave the way for the introduction of Universal Credit, which will replace Housing Benefit from 2013. As a Committee we are concerned on how the scheme will impact on residents especially the people in privately rented accommodation and the repercussions it will have on this Authority come January, 2012. We have agreed to establish a task and finish Review Group to promote general awareness of the changes and help signpost people to external agencies for advice prior to their benefits changing and to try and prevent any issues prior to the changes in January. We also intend to explore the private sector housing. I will update you on this in my next report to Council.

Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite
Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee