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**OVERVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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** – The Committee considered the Work Programme for the 2008/09 Municipal Year and will continue to update and add to our Work Programme throughout the year. We also examined Cabinet’s Forward Plan for particular areas of interest and concern to be included within our Work Programme and also further areas for undertaking Task and Finish Review Groups.
  - (b) **King’s Head Fire** – We received a presentation from the Chief Executive of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and her team on the fire at the King’s Head Hotel on 15th August, 2008. Members were particularly impressed with the dedication and attitude of all of the agencies and staff who were involved in this disastrous event and the way in which they all worked together.
  - (c) **Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) in Bus Shelters** – We received an update on the progress made with regard to the installation and the operation of CCTV in bus shelters in rural areas of the Borough. Following this authority’s successful bid for funding through the Government’s Rural Bus Challenge Fund, we are pleased to see that to date CCTV systems have been installed in 20 bus shelters to meet concerns raised by local residents about perceptions of safety whilst waiting for buses especially at night. However, we still have concerns relating to the CCTV equipment installed at a number of bus shelters and the quality of the footage from those shelters and we have requested an update at a future meeting on those issues.

The cameras have assisted the Police to identify the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour at these bus shelters, which meets the objective behind the bid for Government funding.

- (d) **Vehicles for Sale on the Highway** – We received a report on the initiative of the Environmental Crime Enforcement Team of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit in to deal with the increasing number of cars that have been advertised for sale illegally on North Road, Darlington. A scheme was launched on 11th September, 2008, which involved placing high visibility stickers on vehicles warning potential buyers that vehicles may have been advertised illegally.

We are pleased to note that to date 25 vehicles have been investigated all of which have been removed by the sellers within one day of the sticker being adhered and none of those vehicles have returned to the location. This has resulted in a dramatic reduction of new vehicles being advertised for sale in that area.

- (e) **Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2008-12** – As part of our monitoring role, we received a report on the progress of the Action Plan contained within the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. The strategy aims to ensure decent housing standards are maintained within the private housing market. Investment is and will continue to be, provided in a targeted and co-ordinated way through the Financial Assistance Policy ensuring that the worst private sector housing conditions are tackled first to ensure that the most vulnerable residents are best protected. We were very pleased to see that secured funding has been obtained to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon in private sector homes.

Members were particularly encouraged by the progress that has been made across all of the 14 key areas within the strategy including the Private Sector Housing stock condition survey that will be commissioned this month in partnership with Hartlepool and Stockton Councils, with Darlington taking the leading role.

- (f) **Darlington's Housing Strategy 2008-12** – As part of our monitoring role, we received a report on the progress on the Action Plan contained within the Housing Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in April, 2008. The strategy aims to respond to housing market pressures and report and analyse housing market trends ensuring that local strategic approach is effective.

We are pleased to note that despite the recent economic downturn good progress has been made across all of the 13 key areas within the strategy.

- (g) **Street Scene Review Group** - The Group have met on a number of occasions to which the Assistant Director, Environmental Services and the Street Scene Coordinator of Central Ward has also attended. Members and Officers have discussed the manning boards for each of the Street Scene areas and the training matrix of the operatives.

Members of the Group have also received a presentation from the Assistant Director, Environmental Services in accordance with the terms of reference of this review, highlighting the performance, core principles, continuous improvements and the budget of Street Scene.

The next meeting of the Group has been arranged for 15th December, 2008.

**Councillor Doris Jones**  
**Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee**