
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** – 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) **National Homelessness Advice Service** – We received a presentation from Mike Hill from the Citizen’s Advice Bureau on the National Homeless Advice Service (NHAS), which was formed in 1990, and was a partnership between Citizen’s Advice and Shelter that was wholly funded by the Communities and Local Government and its many predecessors, with the aim of supporting the Citizens Advice Bureau and other voluntary advice agencies in providing time and effective advice and casework to those in housing need.

The presentation covered the NHAS Second Tier Services, which provided free access to consultancy, training and information; the changes to the NHAS since 2006, which included a specific role of working with local authorities to promote good practice and promote joint working between housing authorities and voluntary advice agencies; the three key objectives of the NHAS; the NHAS Model Joint Working Agreement; the NHAS Model Operational Protocols; the Joint Working Agreement Process and the NHAS contact.
 - (c) **CCTV in Rural Bus Shelters** – We received an update on the operation of CCTV at Bus Shelters in the rural areas of the Borough. Following this authority’s successful bid for funding through the Government’s Rural Bus Challenge Fund in February, 2002, we were pleased to see that to date CCTV systems have been installed in 19 bus shelters with one system waiting to be re-installed at the bus shelter, which has recently been replaced at Hurworth Green. It was pleasing to see that since the last update report to this Committee on 29th October, 2008 the seven CCTV equipped bus shelters that were not operational were all repaired in November, 2008.
 - (d) **Mortgage Rescue Scheme** – We received a report informing us of the implementation of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in Darlington, which came into effect on 1st January, 2009. In September, 2008, the Government announced a £1 billion housing package, that included the new £2 million Mortgage Rescue Scheme, which would support vulnerable households, be a targeted and specific homelessness prevention tool and was intended to provide an additional safety net for up to 6,000 homeowners with vulnerable households who were at risk of losing their homes through repossession

over the next two years. We were informed that there was an eligibility criterion for homeowners who would qualify for help under the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, where they could be offered a shared equity option or Government Mortgage to Rent. It was highlighted that there had been an increase from clients quoting financial reasons for accessing the service, 24.1 per cent in January of this year compared to 17.2 per cent for the same period in 2008, and that to date seven applications had been submitted and were in the process of being assessed.

- (e) **Street Scene Review Group** – Since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee, Members of the Review Group visited a number of local supermarkets to seek resident's views on the Street Scene service provided in Darlington. A standard questionnaire had been compiled to assist with this and the comments received from residents were incorporated into the questionnaires which were later analysed by Members at their meeting held on 27th January, 2009.

We noted that the results of the survey showed that the main concerns of residents were in relation to dog fouling, grass cuttings, the sweeping of streets where there were parked cars and refuse being left when bags had been split.

Members of the Review Group met with John Herdman and Nicky Rowland on 11th February, 2009, to discuss the issues in relation to dog fouling and highlight the progress made to date with dog fouling and the ways forward.

The Review Group are in the process of arranging visits to Hartlepool Borough Council and Stockton Borough Council to compare how their Street Scene service operates in comparison to Darlington's.

Councillor Doris Jones
Chair of Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Committee