
OVERVIEW OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Place Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Work Programme 2012/13

2. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2012/13 and possible review topics 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. Following discussion Scrutiny Committee agreed to update its Work Programme to reflect the decisions of the Committee.

Car Parking Strategy

3. We had the opportunity to comment and make suggestions on the emerging proposals for changes and improvements to parking policy for Darlington. The current Parking Strategy was produced in 2009 and since then there have been several changes affecting parking including the identification of sites in Darlington as potential development sites, the introduction of civil parking enforcement in 2010 and the downturn in the economy. An up to date strategy, a key input to the emerging Local Plan, is required to address all aspects of parking in Darlington but with a focus on maintaining the vitality of the town centre. Scrutiny Committee gave consideration to various aspects of the Strategy including parking supply and charges, payment methods, security and safety, residents parking zones (RPZ's), disabled parking, traffic management and district centres.
4. After a great deal of discussion and debate Scrutiny Committee made several suggestions to Officer for inclusion in the Draft Strategy which is to be presented to Cabinet on 4th June 2013. The Committee endorsed a flexible approach to car parking charges and the need to strike a balance between the needs of town centre businesses, motorists and town centre residents. We were impressed by the flexible approach with the possible use of trial areas and pilot schemes, though to avoid confusion there should be a unit price (presently 50 per half hour). Free parking is not an option, but may have some potential used occasionally in association with specific events or promotions.
5. Regeneration of the town centre brings obvious implications for parking and a multi-storey car park may well be necessary. A judicious choice of site and a high standard of design will be crucial to such a scheme as is external funding.

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6. There is scope to improve Residents Parking Zones by introducing a scheme for visitors and by controlling remaining parking spaces in Residents Parking Zones in the interest of fairness.
7. A special attention to parking arrangements may be necessary in Cockerton given its success as a district centre.
8. Following public consultation in June and July 2013 it is anticipated that the final Strategy will be adopted in Autumn 2013.

Cultural Provision in the Borough

9. The Review Group has held a further meeting which Mr. John Dean, Chair, Darlington for Culture, attended to discuss the democratic input to cultural provision and arts services, following budget cuts and the establishment of an Arts Forum by Darlington for Culture. Debate and discussion was lively and Mr. Dean answered Scrutiny's questions following his verbal account on the work of Darlington for Culture. The Review Group consider the role of Darlington for Culture essential to the Creative Darlington process, representing, (though not exclusively) the arts audience and arts practitioners in Darlington. A paper, circulated by a Member, on the way forward for the provision of culture and the arts for Darlington was also discussed. The paper generated a number of interesting and varied comments with the outcome being that the Group were keen to keep responsibility for culture as a core function of the Council with continued Officer support, raising funds wherever and whenever available, in partnership with voluntary organisations and private bodies.

Waste Management (Wheeled Bins) Review Group

10. A further meeting of the Waste Management (Wheeled Bins) Review Group has taken place during April. The Group gave consideration to the next stage of the provision of wheeled bins which included the delivery of information leaflets to all households in the Borough detailing change of refuse and recycling collection dates and the wheeled bin refuse collection service. The wheeled bins are due to be delivered to residents week commencing 7 May and collections due to commence week commencing 17 June 2013. A meeting of the Group will be held during July 2013 after the new waste collection service has begun and the service will be monitored after a reasonable time of operation.
11. Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended :-
 - (a) Various meetings with Officers.
 - (b) Joint briefings with Officers and Portfolio Holders.
 - (c) Creative Darlington Workshop on 19 April 2013.
 - (d) Darlington for Culture Meeting on 19 April 2013.

Councillor Dorothy Long
Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee