
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 2013/14

2. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2013/14 and possible review topics. Following discussion we agreed to update the Work Programme to reflect the decisions of the Committee. We will seek specific updates on on-going projects particularly the Economic Strategy, the Car Parking Strategy and the Local Plan in this Municipal Year. We also hope to contribute to work on the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Review Group are hoping to commence their work on Darlington Markets in the near future.

Housing Strategy Annual Monitoring Report

3. We considered a report which sought Place Scrutiny Committee's views on the Housing Strategy 2012-17. The Strategy was approved in July 2012 and contained a commitment to annually reviewing and assessing progress against targets.
4. We were advised that progress overall had been good with 51 per cent of milestones achieved in the first year of a two year programme. A further 34 per cent of milestones were on schedule and the Council was on course to meet its six objectives.
5. As part of the monitoring exercise 14 milestones (8 per cent) had been deleted as there were no longer appropriate and two new priority actions relating to older persons' accommodation and the introduction of Universal Credit had been added to the refreshed Action Plan.
6. Scrutiny Committee had a detailed discussion on affordable housing and the constraints experienced on its provision in the present economic climate. The majority of our concerns related to the private rented sector and disquiet was expressed at the minority of landlords who neglect their properties. Unfit housing is a problem and Committee suggested that Members could be more vigilant within their Wards and report any problems to the Private Sector Housing Team.

7. We were encouraged by the work undertaken on empty houses in the Borough and were pleased to note that 60 homes had been brought back into use under the Scheme.
8. We have invited the Private Sector Housing Manager to the next ordinary meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee to answer our detailed questions.

Draft Sport and Physical Activity Strategy

9. Place Scrutiny Committee's views were sought on the Draft Sports and Physical Activity Strategy which set out the Council's fifteen year Ambitions and five year Outcomes. The Strategy is supported by an Action Plan which identifies twelve Priority Actions to be implemented over the next two years.
10. The overall aim of the Strategy is to enable more Darlington residents to be more active, more often, and delivery of the objectives will require contributions from a range of agencies and organisation across all sectors.
11. The Draft Strategy has been prepared by a multi-disciplinary Project Team comprising Council Officers and representatives from external agencies such as Sport England and Tees Valley Sport. It is also intended to consult with schools, colleges, sports clubs and community organisations.

Cultural Provision Review Group

12. The Review Group held a further meeting during October to which Darlington for Culture was invited. The Group gave consideration to the consultations held on how the money from the sale of the Arts Centre should be spent. The Group were advised of five options available to the Council however three of those were dismissed for various reasons. The two options that remained were to spread the money around various arts facilities in Darlington and secondly to provide a small theatre for children and young people with the proviso of community use. The Group discussed in detail the two options available and gave its support to the provision of a small theatre for children and young people with some joint use for the wider community.
13. It was also agreed that funds be available to support creative businesses and social entrepreneurs and sums remain available as match funding for bids to other sources of support for the arts. Members expressed their thanks to the Darlington for Culture representative for the challenging but always constructive advice offered.

Markets Review Group

14. The Review Group met on 21 November, 2013 to reconsider the terms of reference for the Group and received an update on progress with the Markets.

15. Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended :-

- (a) Various meetings with Officers.
- (b) Joint briefings with Officers and Portfolio Holders.
- (c) The Action Planning Event on the Economic Strategy at Teesside University on 15th November.

Councillor Dorothy Long
Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee