
OVERVIEW OF CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under my Consumer and Environmental Services Portfolio:
 - (a) **Increases to Taxi Licensing Fees and Charges** – Cabinet gave approval to proposals to increase the fees relating to the licensing of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles, their drivers and operators. In deliberating the proposed increases, which we approved to take effect from 1st April 2006 Cabinet took into consideration the objections received from the trade.
 - (b) **Safer Food Better Business** – following a successful bid to the Food Standards Agency the Tees Valley Authorities were awarded almost £½m. In partnership with other Tees Valley Authorities and Teesside University, this initiative is now in place. The initiative includes training, consultancy, and workshops throughout the Tees Valley area being offered to catering businesses. In Darlington this will be targeted at around 200 businesses.
 - (c) **Heartbeat Awards** – recognising high standards of food hygiene, nutritious menu and provision of no smoking areas, were presented to successful businesses at the Town Centre Forum in February.
 - (d) **Gambling Act** - Darlington hosted a regional training event in February on the new Gambling Act, attracting officers and Elected Members from the North East Region.
 - (e) **Consumer Direct** – this initiative went live in March, providing first point of contact assistance to consumers in Darlington by telephone. This is part of the rollout of a national campaign and service.
 - (f) **Market Study** - Consultants have been appointed to examine the long-term viability issues of the covered market and as part of this will also have regard to the open market.

2. I have attended the following meetings in respect of my Consumer and Environmental Services Portfolio:
 - (a) PPCP scrutiny meeting – 7th February, 7th March.
 - (b) Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority, 2nd, 16th February, 16th March.
 - (c) Regional Management Board of the North East Fire & Rescue Authorities, 17th March.
 - (d) Community Partnership Steering Group, 14th February.
 - (e) Darlington Environmental Forum – 6th March.
 - (f) Gambling Act Training, 17th February.
 - (g) Citizenship Ceremony, 14th March.
 - (h) Launch of ‘Safer Food Better Business’ at Tall Trees, Yarm – 1st February.

- (i) Meeting with Tees Valley Authorities to discuss potential joint working with Waste Management, 6th March.
- (j) Briefing meetings with various Directors and Assistant Directors.

Councillor Steve Harker
Consumer and Environmental Services Portfolio