
**ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11**

1. I am delighted to present the Annual Report of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of Members of that Committee. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Officers who support the Committee, in particular Steve Petch, Planning and Economic Strategy Manager, Lead Officer for Economy and Environment Scrutiny and Karen Graves from Democratic Services. Special thanks are extended to the following Cabinet Members for their continued support - Councillors Williams, Leader of the Council and Economy portfolio, D.A. Lyonette, Transport portfolio, Wallis, Sustainable Environment and Climate Change portfolio and Harker, Health and Leisure portfolio.
2. Although we have scrutinised and challenged in a number of areas within our remit I would like to focus on some of the areas which we have been heavily involved in this year and which are worthy of particular mention.
3. **Healthier Lives for Children and Young People in County Durham and Darlington** – We were involved in a joint piece of work with all Scrutiny Committees in relation to scrutinising elements of the Director of Public Health’s Annual Report ‘Healthier Lives for Children and Young People Living in County Durham and Darlington’. We focussed on Worklessness and scrutinised the emerging Work and Skills Plan which had been developed using the Regional Employability Framework and which concentrated on individuals by assisting them to seek and stay in work. We recommended that Officers investigate how to collect data at Ward Level which may indicate current worklessness trends and benefit claimant figures be refined.

In February 2011 we received a presentation from both Jonathan Lamb of Business Enterprise North East and Chris Livingstone of Jobcentre Plus. They updated us on the business support available for small, medium enterprises, available employment opportunities, current trends and changes to the benefit system.

4. **Local Development Framework Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Consultation Response** – We continue to be heavily involved in the ongoing process of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy preparations. We were pleased to welcome Mr. N. Lawrence who attended Scrutiny on behalf of the NHS to ensure that the provision of health service facilities was adequately covered within the LDF. Recently Scrutiny Committee also considered the LDF Accommodating Growth Development Plan document (DPD).

5. **Third Local Transport Plan** – We have also been involved in the consultation process with regard to the Third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) and looked at the options which would achieve the outcomes and tackle the challenges identified during its development. We were advised that a Sustainable Environmental Assessment would be undertaken shortly and the Tees Valley Strategy was to be summarised to reflect Darlington issues only.
6. **Cycling Through the Town Centre** – At the request of Cabinet, Scrutiny has monitored cycling through Darlington Town Centre on a six monthly basis for the year 2010/11. Members of the cycling groups and a representative of Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) have attended, and contributed to, several meetings of Scrutiny to put forward their views on cycling in the Town Centre.
7. **Covenant of Mayors** –As a Scrutiny Committee we were pleased to receive an update on the progress on the European Commission Covenant of Mayors commitment for local authorities to take the lead in tackling climate change and voluntarily commit to surpass the EU objectives for carbon reduction. Darlington is one of twelve Local Authorities in the North East who has agreed to reduce emissions by more than 20 per cent by 2020.
8. **Medium Term Financial Plan** – We have given a great deal of consideration to the financial position and the pressures facing the Council over the next few years and have examined the draft Medium Term Financial Plan. All Scrutiny Committees have assisted with the budgetary process by holding special meetings to consider those elements of the proposals which were within their remits and to make recommendations to Cabinet.
9. **Other Areas -**
 - (a) **Winter Maintenance** – Due to the extreme weather conditions we requested a report on the Winter Maintenance Service and were encouraged by the hard work undertaken by Officers and employees to keep the Borough’s road network passable at all times.
 - (b) **Darlington’s Green Spaces** - The Committee undertook site visits to Countryside Wild Spaces and the Council’s nature reserves, in order to see the work in progress which is aimed at improving areas of wild open space, access and levels of bio-diversity. The visits proved to be highly successful.
 - (c) **Network Management Plan** – At the request of Cabinet, Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee has a duty to monitor the Network Management Plan, a requirement of the Traffic Management Act 2004. Further sections of the Plan have been under development and the Council is expected to meet a number of criteria whilst delivering the plan.
 - (d) **Darlington’s Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS)** – We were advised that the production of a Green Infrastructure Strategy represented an important stage in identifying and setting out the long term vision and approach to delivering a quality, integrated and multifunctional green infrastructure network for Darlington. We were

informed that the GIS would be a ten year strategy with a five year review. It will inform various documents in the LDF and the delivery of Darlington's Open Spaces Strategy and related plans.

- (e) **Tree and Woodland Strategy 2010-2015** – As part of the consultation process Scrutiny Committee was asked to give comment on the revised Tree and Woodland Strategy originally adopted in 2000.
 - (f) **Service Plan and Service Plan Performance Monitoring** – We have continued to scrutinise and monitor the four service plans including those elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy 'One Darlington : Perfectly Placed' for which this Scrutiny Committee has responsibility.
 - (g) **LSP Theme Groups** - We regularly received reports on the work of both the Green and Prosperous Theme Groups and welcome the opportunity to see the aspects of work both Groups are undertaking.
 - (h) **Policy Review**- Economy and Environment Scrutiny has undertaken an in depth review of the provision of Cultural Services for the Borough of Darlington. We looked at provision at the Arts Centre, the Head of Steam and The Forum and whilst we understand the financial constraints the Council face, made strong recommendations to Cabinet to ensure continued Arts provision for Darlington. We were pleased to be advised of the work of the Inquiry Group which had been established to investigate how to provide continued arts provision within Darlington.
 - (i) **Economy** – We continue to receive information regarding the current economic conditions within the Borough including the employment opportunities available for the people of Darlington, including the useful briefing held in March which was very beneficial to Members.
 - (j) **Public Art in the Borough** – We were advised of the location of on-going public artworks, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Percent for the Arts, that had been commissioned by the Council.
10. Finally, I would like to express my thanks to Members of the Committee who have brought so much zest and commitment to the work of the Committee. I would particularly like to express thanks to retiring members, Councillors Hartley, Jenkinson, Robson, Ruck and Walker for their long service and valuable input,

**Councillor Dorothy Long,
Chair of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee**