

Press Cutting

Northern Echo (though similar articles were published in many other newspapers)

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Dishing the dirt on filthy streets



Bottom of pile: The survey found that 32 per cent of Easington District Council's streets were unclean

A NORTH-EAST council says that it is cleaning up its act after its dirty streets saw it ranked at the bottom of a newly-published environmental survey.

The survey of the region's local authority lands and highways by the Audit Commission covers the year 2004-2005 and found 32 per cent of Easington District Council's streets unclean.

In contrast, Durham City Council has come out on top with an unclean rating of only two per cent.

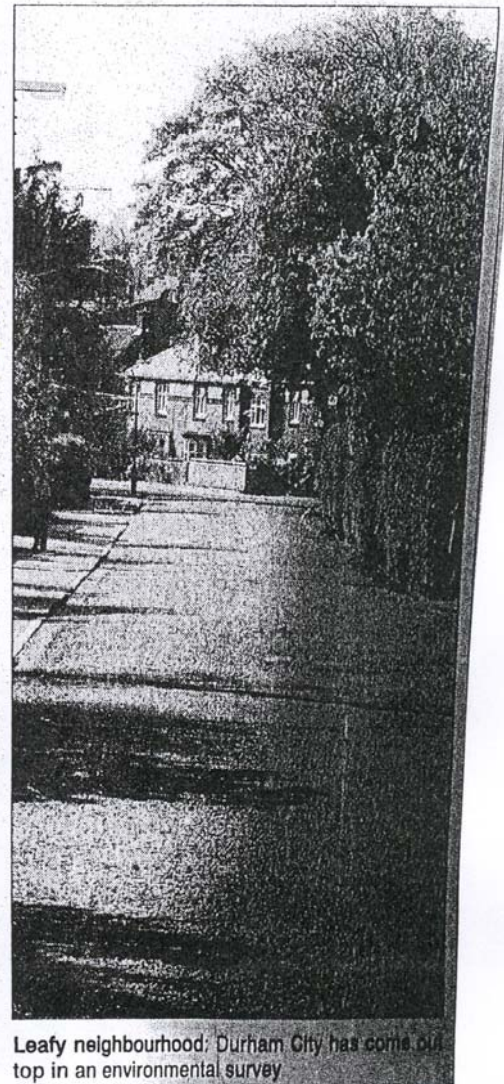
Also not faring well in the survey were North Tyneside with a 29 per cent rating, Gateshead 23 per cent, Newcastle 22.4 per cent, Sunderland 22.1 per cent and Derwentside 21 per cent.

The percentage of dirty streets and land in Darlington was 19 per cent, with Middlesbrough at 18 per cent, Teesdale 15 per cent, Chester-le-Street 11 per cent, and Hartlepool five per cent.

Reacting to the survey, GMB regional secretary Tom Brennan urged the retention of as many street cleaners as possible, saying there were no short cuts or cheap solutions to the problem.

He added: "Keeping an area clean is conducive to building up a sense of social responsibility and a feel-good factor."

Following the publication of the survey yesterday, Oliver Serratt, director of community services at Easington said that the data was more than a year old.



Leafy neighbourhood: Durham City has come out top in an environmental survey

ALMOST a quarter of Wearside's streets are strewn with rubbish, according to latest national figures.

But while 22.1 per cent of Sunderland's roads are not clean, the situation is even worse in East Durham where 32 per cent of the streets are dirty.

However, the figures, compiled by the GMB union, show Durham City streets as the cleanest in the North East, with just two per cent dirty.

The public sector union has ranked the communities through information supplied to the Audit Commission for 2004/5 by local authorities themselves and published in Best Value Performance indicators.

Tom Brennan, GMB Northern regional secretary, said there were no shortcuts to keeping the streets clean.

He said authorities which saw keeping streets and public places clean as a high-priority should spend enough money, and manage it wisely, to do this.

"These councils accept that street cleaning is a labour-intensive service that requires a workforce properly paid and equipped, sharing a civic pride in what they do," he said.

"Keeping an area clean is conducive to building up a sense of social responsibility and a feel-good factor; seeing an area uncared for has the opposite effect.

"This survey shows there is room for improvement in many areas. GMB, as the union which represents street cleaners, is happy to share our experiences with residents' groups, council tenants and local councillors on the winning formulas."

Oliver Sherratt, director of community services for the District of Easington Council, said the figures were based on data which was more than a year old and the situation had greatly improved.

He said there had been a 10 per cent increase in the number of clean streets in the district, so the figure for dirty streets

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now stood at 22 per cent.

Jeff Riddell, head of environmental and leisure services for Durham City Council, said: "We are always looking to improve the quality of the environment and the appearance of the city and surrounding districts."

The council says it regularly runs campaigns about litter and will this year be launching a project aimed at highlighting the safe disposal of chewing gum.

Peter High, head of Environmental Services for Sunderland City Council, said: "We have a strong commitment to the environment with more than £3.5million of resources targeted across the city aimed at keeping our streets clean for all our residents."

He said the authority's efforts had been recognised in surveys carried out among residents which found people thought clean streets were one of the main contributions towards improving quality of life in Sunderland with a 60 per cent satisfaction rate.

He said moves to improve the cleanliness of streets include education programmes and improved facilities to help prevent lunchtime littering, designated clean teams to target specific areas and increased investment in mechanical sweepers.

Table of grime

PERCENTAGE of streets which are dirty, according to the GMB figures:

- Easington – 32 per cent;
- North Tyneside – 29 per cent;
- Sunderland – 22.1 per cent;
- South Tyneside – 20.6 per cent;
- Sedgfield – 19 per cent;
- Chester-le-Street – 11 per cent;
- Durham City – two per cent.