

**DISTRICT OF EASINGTON
COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT
2004/5**

Scrutiny in Easington

Annual Report 2004/5

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Introduction

This annual report details the work of the District of Easington Council's Scrutiny function exercised via the Scrutiny Management Board and the four Scrutiny Committees. It highlights the impact of Scrutiny upon the Council's decision-making processes and ultimately the impact on those services provided either directly by the Council or in partnerships with other agencies to the people of Easington.

The report examines the work during 2004/5 of the Scrutiny Committees, details the developments and improvements made to the Scrutiny processes within the Council and also suggests areas of work to be undertaken during the 2005/6 municipal year.

The past year has been one of significant challenges for Easington - the Review of the Council's Senior Management Structure, the further development of East Durham Homes and the associated monitoring arrangements and Strategic Housing function, the review of the Council's Procurement arrangements and the Council's proposals to meet the Government's E-Government targets for local Councils are just some of the areas that have featured strongly within the work of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

The role of the Scrutiny Management Board in co-ordinating the work of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and liaising with Executive Member for Scrutiny Liaison and E-Government in ensuring that Scrutiny members' roles in previewing policy and service development at the formative stage has continued to develop.

Further assessments have been made by the Audit Commission regarding the Council's Scrutiny function and whilst feedback has been positive, there has been a recognition amongst members and officers that further improvements can and will be made to ensure that members prioritise the areas of work being scrutinised and that the general public can engage within the process.

Whilst the Scrutiny function continues to develop, there are still a number of areas where we could do better. Public participation remains an area which needs to be developed although the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee continues to have an appointed representative of the Tenants Federation as a co-optee on that Committee. Furthermore, a number of issues have been considered by the Scrutiny Committees which have generated considerable public interest, such as Maintenance of Closed Churchyards and the Council's kerbside recycling scheme

Further development work is to be undertaken with Councillors to assist them in nurturing the skills needed in their role as both scrutineers and community representatives. A detailed review of members training and development needs has commenced which will ultimately lead to the Council securing Charter status for its member development service. As part of this development, members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees have received further development training in respect of the Scrutiny function, their role within the function and how this can be improved.

As a Scrutiny Management Board we are committed to the principles of strong scrutiny of those issues which we as community representatives know are of high importance to the residents of Easington. All of the Council's Scrutiny Committees welcome representatives and contributions from the community of Easington as an essential element of good scrutiny.

In summary, this has been a busy and productive year for the Scrutiny Committees as you will see from the individual reports from committees. The Scrutiny

Management Board and Scrutiny members are continually striving to ensure that our work complements the strategic and policy setting work of the Executive and that those corporate priorities and performance targets agreed by the Council are met.

Councillor Geoff Pinkney
Chair of Audit Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Geraldine Bleasdale
Vice Chair of Audit Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Colin Patching
Chair of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Richard Burnip
Vice Chair of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Alan Burnip
Chair of Resources Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Peter Ward
Vice Chair of Resources Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Dennis Raine
Chair of Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Alice Naylor
Vice Chair of Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is an important part of the Government's drive to modernise local government - the way in which decisions are made and public services are improved. Government legislation required the Council to replace the old Committee system with a new decision making process. This process is set out under the Council's constitution introduced in May 2002 and consists of:

- An Executive, chaired by the Leader of the Council and elected by the Council who make policy and service delivery decisions.
- Four Scrutiny Committees.
- Regulatory Committees dealing with issues such as Development Control, Licensing and Standards.

The Scrutiny Committees' key roles are to:-

- Review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any Council functions.
- Make reports and/or recommendations to the Council and/or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions.
- Consider any matter affecting the District of Easington or its inhabitants.
- Exercise the right to ask the Executive to think again about decisions made but not yet implemented (Call-in).

The Scrutiny Committees assist the Council in developing and reviewing its policies by:

- conducting research, community and other consultation into policy issues and proposals.
- engaging with members of the local community in examining policies.
- questioning other Councillors and Officers about their views on issues and proposals affecting the district.
- liaising with other organisations to try and improve the services provided to the residents of Easington.

The committees also review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in terms of the success of its policies against its priorities and objectives, its performance indicators and measures and how well Council services are received.

The Scrutiny Committees decide which areas they wish to examine and may investigate particular issues in depth. The issues examined may arise following representations from the public, concerns of Councillors or follow on from reports about the Council's activities from outside agencies such as the Council's External Auditors or the Best Value Inspectorate.

In short, the Scrutiny process is about improving services for people by being responsive to their needs and making the Council's decision-making processes more open, accountable and inclusive to residents.

The Scrutiny Management Board

Consisting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Council's four Scrutiny Committees, the Scrutiny Management Board was first established in 2000. At that time, the board was an informal meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny with the Cabinet Portfolio holder for Scrutiny Liaison and E-Government.

The meetings were established to provide the Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs with the information and deliberations of the Cabinet when they had made their decisions at their meeting the previous day. This gave members an opportunity to pre-empt any potential call-in references or requests for further information when the minutes of the Cabinet were formally reported to the Scrutiny Committees.

The Scrutiny Management Board acts as a sounding board for policy development and changes to service delivery methods at an early stage and will refer issues down to the appropriate Scrutiny Committees. This serves two purposes:-

- firstly, it gives non-executive members an opportunity to view policy development and service delivery proposals prior to their being agreed by the Executive, hence giving these members a sense of ownership to the end decision of the Executive.
- secondly, it provides both report authors and the Executive with a valuable mechanism for feedback and challenge regarding their proposals.

More and more reports and proposals are being considered by the Executive which include feedback and input from the Scrutiny Committees prior to a decision having been made. Also, members are receiving and contributing to regular policy development and service review reports in the Scrutiny Committees rather than periodic routine reports for information.

The Board has developed its pre-Scrutiny role for a number of key corporate policy and service review proposals including:-

- Organisational structure reviews in the former Public Services Directorate and in the establishment of the Housing Strategy Unit.
- Development of The Council's Environmental Policy
- Development of a Learn direct Centre of Excellence
- Developing a system for monitoring how the Council's plans to meet its E-Government Targets
- Modern Apprenticeships

The Scrutiny Management Board has also taken the lead in developing how the Council's Scrutiny role can be utilised to monitor the Council's progress in meeting some of its key priority areas and targets in respect of Organisational Development, Procurement, Electronic Government and Service Delivery and member development.

In holding the Executive to account, a number of issues have been referred by the Scrutiny Management Board to individual Scrutiny Committees for further investigation such as:-

- Explanations for variances reported as part of Capital Programme monitoring
- Purchasing new radios for Street Wardens

- The use of resources generated by selling land within the Council's Industrial Land portfolio

The Scrutiny Management Board also acts as a referral mechanism for issues of public and member concern that arise during the year. Referrals have been made to the Scrutiny Committees on issues relating to the Post Office's proposals for streamlining their sub – Post office structures, the proposed pricing policies of local water companies, special collections and the Public consultation mechanisms for changes to bus services.

The Scrutiny Management Board have also charged the Scrutiny Committees with appointing representatives to take part Working Groups that have been established to develop/review the following Council policies:-

- Community Involvement and Engagement Strategy
- Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Housing Allocations Policy

Audit Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Audit Scrutiny Committee includes:-

- reviewing and scrutinising decisions made or actions taken in respect of the Council's functions relating to corporate issues, complaints, inquiries, financial probity and other related matters.
- assisting the Council and the Executive in developing its budget and policy framework.
- scrutinising and reviewing the Council's performance in respect of its policy objectives, performance targets and in response to external reports from the District Auditor and CPA inspection service.
- inspecting/reviewing Best Value Reviews, including Improvement Plans.

The Committee carries out its work in a variety of ways which include formal committee meetings, working parties for specific investigations and site visits.

During 2004/5, the Audit Scrutiny Committee have received regular reports from the Council's Internal Audit section regarding ongoing Audits of:-

- Creditors
- National Non Domestic Rates
- Sundry Debtors
- Register of Electors
- Chairman's Charity Account
- Transport
- Council Tax
- Benefits
- Corporate Credit Card
- Accounting and Budgeting Control System
- Cash Office Collections
- Petty Cash
- Postal Systems

There have been a number of external reports considered by the Committee from the District Audit Service relating to

- Follow-up Review of Corporate Governance
- Follow-up of Previous Studies within the 2003/4 Audit
 - Scrutiny
 - Service Planning
 - Asset Management
 - Human Resources
 - Management of Leisure Services
 - Procurement

Action plans for these external reviews were drawn up and the Committee have interviewed appropriate officers within the Council who were charged with ensuring that progress was made within these areas. As a result of these interviews the

Committee are satisfied that the Council's performance in these areas will be improved.

The Audit Scrutiny Committee have engaged in policy development by considering reports which review/amend the Council's agreed policy in areas including

- Data Protection and the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Delivery of Services Electronically
- Rechargeable repairs policy
- Vehicle Tracking System
- Responsive Repairs and Planned Maintenance
- Peterlee Hotel Feasibility Study

In respect of the Audit Scrutiny Committees role in monitoring Best Value Reviews, the Committee identified that the Council needed to establish the progress which was being made by the Council and East Durham Homes in securing a two-star housing service. Members had realised that the Council needed to secure this status for its Housing Service in order to access funding that would enable the Council to undertake works to its Housing stock to reach the Governments Decent Homes Standards within the required timescales.

Accordingly, the Committee met to discuss the progress that had been made by both East Durham Homes and the Council against the improvement plan that had been drawn up following the indicative ALMO inspection that had taken place in February 2004.

In 2003/4, the Audit Scrutiny Committee undertook a specific investigation into the security arrangements at the Council's Hackworth Road depot following the theft of three lawn mowers. This identified three areas of weaknesses to be addressed.

The Audit Committee recommended that:-

- a) a system be set up to record spot checks carried out by the Gatehouse Officer on vehicles leaving the depot, and
- b) external advice be sought to ensure the best possible security arrangements for the depot with a view to upgrading the current CCTV equipment as a matter of urgency.

Accordingly an upgraded CCTV system was installed at the depot together with an agreement to upgrade the perimeter fencing at the depot.

As a follow up to this review, the Audit Scrutiny Committee have undertaken further site visits to the Depot and have interviewed the Depot Manager to ascertain the progress made on this matter. The Committee were advised that following the review undertaken, management now carried out spot checks on vehicles entering and leaving the depot. Whilst there had been an agreement that the perimeter fence needed to be upgraded, the committee have been advised that these works had been put on hold pending a decision being made on the potential centralisation of all of the Council's Depots. The Audit Scrutiny Committee was pleased to note the improvements made at the depot following their investigations.

Partnership Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee involves the review and scrutiny of the working relationships between the Council and outside organisations acting in partnership with the Council to deliver public services to the community of Easington.

During the last year, the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee have continued to develop existing and new relationships with external partners. The principal objective of the Committee remains ensuring that the interests of local people and the community well being within Easington are enhanced by robust partnership working.

The Committee carries out its work mainly through a combination of formal meetings of the Committee and informal meetings between members of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee and representatives of the Council's external partner organisations. The Committee is constantly looking at areas of best practice from other local authorities and believes this to be one of the strengths of its working.

The Committee selected Anti-Social Behaviour as a single thematic issue for investigation for 2003/4. A list of partner organisations who work with the Council in addressing the causes of Anti-Social Behaviour, providing diversionary activities and giving support to those people affected by Anti-Social Behaviour was drawn up by the Committee upon which its investigations were centred.

This investigation ran into 2004/5 and a detailed report which highlights the results of the investigation together with a number of recommendations arising therefrom has been produced for approval by the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee. The report will be presented to the Executive in due course and will be placed on deposit for public inspection.

The results of the Committees investigations will be used to drive policy development and operational matters in terms of the Council's relationship with partners in respect of tackling anti-social behaviour.

The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee began their work programme by receiving monitoring and progress reports on partnership issues from Executive Members and Political Leaders. As a result of this process a number of key strategic issues were highlighted which, in the Committee's view will warrant further investigation as part of the 2005/6 work programme. These include the Northern Way Growth Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy and strengthening the Scrutiny of the Council's Partnerships.

Follow-up reports to previous investigations have also been undertaken in respect of delays in the provision of Gas supplies within the District and also the success of the Section 30 Order applied to the Deneside area of Seaham under the terms of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003.

The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee have continued their work in scrutinising the work and achievements of some of the Council's key partners as well as that of external organisations.

Early in 2004/5, the Committee received a report advising of proposed changes that were being proposed by the Government in relation to the means by which members of the public could make representations in respect of Water Companies and their pricing policies and work plans. The consumer organisation charged with this role, Watervoice, was concerned that under a review of their structure, they would become

a more remote body compared with their current structure. Accordingly, representatives of that organisation attended a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to answer member queries about the future mechanisms for public engagement in respect of Water Companies within the district. At the same time, members took the opportunity to add support to representations that had already been expressed by Watervoice in respect of Northumbrian Water and Anglian Water companies' proposed future pricing policies.

The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee were also engaged as statutory consultees in respect of an application for inclusion in the Pharmaceutical list for a development within East Shore Village, Seaham.

A further issue was referred to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee relating to the withdrawal of Bus Services at South Hetton and, more specifically, the consultation methods by which changes to public bus services were communicated to the General Public. This issue has been scoped by the Committee and will form part of the Committee's work programme for 2005/6.

The Committee also received an Audit Commission report entitled 'Drug Misuse – Reducing the Local Impact' which highlighted areas of good practice and the components of good quality services in treating drug misuse as well as highlighting gaps in service nationally. The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee had already identified substance misuse as a high factor in contributing to anti-social behaviour within the district as part of their previous investigations. They therefore agreed that a local interpretation of the national report should be prepared and considered. Anna Lynch attended the Committee and provided this local interpretation.

The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee received information relating to:-

- The substance misuse services currently provided within Easington District
- The availability of 'shared care'
- The methods through which service user feedback are gathered
- The assessment, treatment and support services available to young people
- The gaps in service provision evident within Easington and how these were to be addressed

The Partnerships Scrutiny Committee agreed that this matter warranted further investigation and this again will form part of the 2005/6 work programme.

In view of the growing importance placed upon partnership working and the effectiveness of these arrangements and how they should be performance managed, a representative of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee also attended an INLOGOV seminar and workshop entitled 'Strengthening the Scrutiny of Partnerships'. A feedback report and summary of the sessions were presented to the Committee.

Resources Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Resources Scrutiny Committee involves renewing decisions made or actions taken in connection with the Council's resources including staff, finance, land and property and information.

The Committee carries out its work based upon its work programme which is set at the start of the municipal year. Work is primarily undertaken within formal committee meetings although working parties are established on a task and finish basis for specific issues.

To enable both planned and urgent work programme issues to be undertaken, regular meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee are held to monitor progress against work programme issues as well as one-off pieces of work.

For 2004/05, the Resources Scrutiny Committee identified the following as their main work programme issues:-

- Follow-up review of externally funded initiatives
- The final results and resource implications of the job evaluation appeals process
- Asset Management
- Corporate Procurement
- E-Government Targets and resource implications thereof
- Human Resources Strategy
- Resource implications of meeting the Council's obligations of the Disability Discrimination Act

The Resources Scrutiny Committee sat in working party mode to consider the future of a number of posts on the Council's establishment that were funded by way of external funding regimes. The purpose of the review was to identify the posts which were externally funded, ascertain the deadlines for the cessation of such funding and to consider whether the Council should mainstream the posts onto the permanent staffing structure.

The working party received information from the relevant Directors and Heads of Service regarding:-

- X the posts within their Units/Directorates funded via external resources including job descriptions.
- X the contributions made by the various posts towards the Council's Corporate Priorities as well as departmental and unit service plans.
- X the duration of the funding regimes for each post.
- X the outcomes and milestones achieved and the performance measures attached to each post.
- X the options available for continued funding of the posts/initiatives.
- X the degree of priority attached to each post and the risks associated with posts not being mainstreamed.

At the conclusion of the Working Party's deliberations a series of recommendations were submitted to the Executive which proposed the mainstreaming of a number of key posts for the 2005/6 financial year.

As a result of the Working Party's considerations, the Council has agreed to mainstream a number of posts to tackle issues relating to Community Development, Street Wardens, the Private Sector Landlords Accreditation scheme, Community Safety, Youth Strategy support and sports development.

In respect of job evaluation appeals, a final report detailing the outcomes of appeals made against job evaluation results and the associated financial implications for the Council has been considered by the Committee.

The Resources Scrutiny Committee have considered policy development reports relating to:-

- X Postal Voting at the All-postal European Parliamentary Elections (June 2004) and the Regional Assembly/Local Government Review Referendum (November 2004)
- X Liveability Fund Projects
- X Sickness Monitoring and associated resource implications
- X Budget Setting Process for 2005/6
- X Recruitment and Retention of Staff
- X Supporting People
- X Community Centres
- X Garage Repairs

The Committee also considered special reports relating to urgent issues in respect of:-

- X Modern Apprenticeships
- X Purchase of Airwave Radios
- X Investors in People
- X Organisational Development

Importantly, the Resources Committee have established positive ways forward in shaping and developing policy in respect of budget setting and medium term financial planning and corporate procurement. This has enabled Members to develop a sense of ownership to potential policy changes in these areas.

The review of the Council's Policy and procedures in respect of Corporate Procurement have featured heavily in the Committee's work Programme for 2004/5. All members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee have received specialist training in respect of the National Procurement Strategy and how this has shaped the Council's own policy. The Committee have considered the development of the Council's Procurement Code of Practice which supports the Strategy and referred its comments to the Executive when the Code was placed before them for approval. This work will continue in 2005/6.

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee involves reviewing decisions made or actions taken in connection with the performance of the Council's front-line services.

The Committee carries out its work in a number of different ways. Formal committee meetings are held every three weeks to consider regular service position statements in respect of the various service units. These service position reports are assigned specific dates as part of the committee's agreed work programme. However, working parties have also been set up to investigate specific issues. Site visits have been undertaken by members of the committee to view service delivery in respect of leisure, closed churchyards and graffiti removal at first hand.

In order to monitor the Committees agreed work programme and to consider urgent issues of concern which may arise, informal meetings of between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and appropriate officers are held regularly.

Regarding the reporting of service position statements, Members have focussed their work on how service delivery within the Council reflects the Council's agreed corporate priorities. The new report format also sets out a degree of performance measurement whereby Members are given clear information relating to:

- X achievements/non-achievements in service delivery
- X performance measures against which achievements are benchmarked
- X performance indicators
- X tasks and targets specific to the service unit to which the reports relate
- X timescales for achievements and the evidence base to reinforce outcomes and achievements.

The Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee has received regular service position statements relating to the following units/services:-

Community Regeneration
Regeneration and Partnerships
Recycling
Revenues and Benefits
Community Development
East Durham Homes
Environmental Services
Planning and Building Control
Leisure Services
Environmental Health and Licensing
Corporate Development Unit
Energy Efficiency
Sickness Monitoring
Complaints
Housing Business Plan
East Durham Business Service
Engineering and Countryside

A number of working parties have been established by the committee to examine specific service delivery issues.

To date, working parties have met to investigate issues relating to:-

- X Post Office closures
- X Maintenance of Closed Churchyards and Unstable memorials
- X Misuse of Open Spaces (continued from 2003/4)

By meeting in working party mode Members have been able to access service units with a view to addressing issues or concerns raised with a view to improving service delivery and customer satisfaction. Members have considered reports from Council Officers, outside agencies and comparative information from other local authorities. This has enabled the groups to draw together recommendations which aim to improve Council services in these areas. For example, the working party on the misuse of open spaces, which met four times during 2004, was instrumental in completing a policy which we have now been able to implement with some effect in Peterlee to tackle a variety of issues regarding the misuse of open spaces and , in particular, nuisance vehicles. It was a good example of working together with officers across a number of departments to produce such a policy. The next step is to adopt the policy on a district wide basis.

The major development for the Committee during 2004/5 was the establishment of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee's role in monitoring the performance of East Durham Homes. Regular reports were given by officers within the Council's Housing Strategy Unit with supporting information provided by representatives of East Durham Homes. Whilst this is still in its infancy, members are keen that the monitoring role is systematically delivered to ensure that East Durham Homes are delivering the Housing Service that the Council and its customers desire.

The Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee has also been attended by a number of members of the public when issues of public concern / importance have arisen. Invitations to interested parties have been extended by the Committee on issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour, Maintenance of closed churchyards and unstable memorials and the Kerb-it recycling scheme. The Committee would like to see this trend continue during 2005/6 as it is imperative that the Council's Scrutiny process can demonstrate that it is accessible by the community and in doing so, the Community can influence the Council's decision-making process

The Service Delivery Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group continues to meet and have amend great strides in monitoring and co-ordinating the work of the various service units of the Council in addressing the district wide problem of anti-social behaviour. Regular reports have been considered by members of the working party which include:-

Performance Reports for the Street Wardens Scheme

Tenancy Relations Performance Statistics

Anti-Social Behaviour Unit Performance Report

Development of the District of Easington Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme

The working group continues to lead on the development of policies and procedures to tackle anti-social behaviour within the district.

WORK PROGRAMMES 2005/6

In accordance with the recommendations of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, all Scrutiny Committees have been advised that they should take cognisance of the Council's agreed strategic objectives, priorities and targets when formulating their Work Programmes.

Accordingly, the Scrutiny Management Board have met to consider a range of issues that feature highly amongst the aforementioned objectives, priorities and targets and which they feel would merit specific scrutiny.

The proposed Work Programme for each of the Scrutiny Committees has been prepared in accordance with these criteria. The Work Programmes should allow for urgent items to be referred to each Committee by either the Executive or other Scrutiny Committees. Furthermore, from time to time issues may arise at a national or local level which will necessitate an input by the Scrutiny Committee(s). However, in such instances, the Committee should assess the relative priority of such referrals and issues against its agreed Work Programme.

The Work Programmes will be supplemented by the Scrutiny Committees' key role in holding the Executive to account by closely scrutinising its decisions and ensuring that Scrutiny is involved in the formation stages of policy development and service delivery.

Audit Scrutiny Committee

The work programme for the Audit Scrutiny Committee for 2005/6 will involve the consideration of:

- quarterly reports by the Council's Internal Audit Team on progress in completing the agreed Audit Plan and any follow-up Audit work undertaken;
- District Audit Service reports;
- progress reports from the Best Value reviews scheduled for 2005/06;
- implementation plans from previously agreed Best Value reviews;
- quarterly reports for all Best Value Performance Indicators including measures for improving performance where necessary;

The Scrutiny Management Board have considered a number of issues, which would merit specific scrutiny and have been assessed as key priority areas for the Council.

Issues that have been identified for the Audit Scrutiny Committee are:

- Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Revised Methodology
- Best Value Review of Support Services
- Risk Management – Review and Monitoring Corporate Risks
- Performance Management and Performance Indicators

Partnership Scrutiny Committee

The work programme for the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee for 2005/6 will comprise follow up work to the 2004/5 investigations commenced in respect of Substance Misuse and consultation mechanisms regarding Bus Services, routine reporting from Executive portfolio holders and specific task based reviews of priority areas which fall within the remit of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

It is also proposed that a follow-up report be undertaken into the Committees review of how the Council 'Tackles Anti-social behaviour through Partnership working'.

A schedule has been prepared for the Executive portfolio holders and the leader of the Council to attend a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to report upon progress made during the last year regarding partnership arrangements that fall within the remit of their portfolio. Such reports will demonstrate how the Council's partnership arrangements contribute towards the Council's corporate objectives, priorities and targets.

Of the issues identified by the Scrutiny Management Board as meriting specific scrutiny and being key priority areas for the Council, the following were identified as falling within the remit of the Partnerships Committee:

- Scrutiny of the Local Strategic Partnership
- Community Consultation and Engagement
- Community Development – support to Community and Voluntary Organisations
- The Health Service within Easington

Resources Scrutiny Committee

The work programme for the Resource Scrutiny Committee for 200/6 will involve a mixture of follow-up work relating to a number of issues that were considered by the Resources Scrutiny Committee during 2004/5 and new reviews that act upon key areas of Council activity falling within the remit of the Committee.

The follow-up work to be undertaken by the Resources Scrutiny Committee includes:

- the resource implications of Sickness/ Absenteeism
- the review of Community Centres as part of the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

Of those issues previously identified by the Scrutiny Management Board as meriting specific scrutiny and being key priority areas for the Council, the following were identified as falling within the remit of the Resources Scrutiny Committee:

- The Gershon Report and the Efficiency Agenda
- Procurement
- Asset Management
- Supporting People

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee

The work programme of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee for 2005/6 will comprise both periodic reporting by service units on performance against the Council's targets and objectives, as well as specific task based reviews into a number of priority areas that fall within the remit of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee.

A schedule for the service position statement reporting has been drawn up (Appendix A refers). These reports will provide position statements detailing achievements and non-achievements for each unit against their service plans, best value and local performance indicators, strategy documents into which they have an input, risk management action plans and other key tasks and targets.

The Scrutiny Management Board has considered a number of issues that would merit specific scrutiny and are key priority areas for the Council.

Issues identified specifically for the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee include:

- East Durham Homes
- Recycling – Kerb-it scheme and Green waste
- Services for Older People
- Services for Young People

The Committee will also continue to receive reports from the Anti-Social Behaviour Working Party in respect of how local services are tackling problems of Anti-Social Behaviour within the district.

Developing the Scrutiny Process

Reference has been made earlier in the report the follow-up report undertaken by the Audit Commission in respect of the Council's Scrutiny function. The report highlighted that good progress had been made in developing the arrangements for Scrutiny within the Council. However, further areas for development had been identified, namely:-

- the development of community involvement in the role of Scrutiny and
- the provision of appropriate training and support to members to enable them to develop their role as community representatives and Scrutineers

In respect of community involvement within the Scrutiny process, there have been further developments made by the Council. The Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee has been attended by a number of people when specific issues of community interest are discussed. However, this is not systematic throughout all of the Scrutiny Committees and has been raised by members as an important area for further development. The Council has agreed to develop a Community Involvement and Engagement Strategy and members of all Scrutiny Committees have been appointed to a working party charged with developing this strategy.

The continued development of the Council's Electronic Government strategy will also address the issue of community engagement with a target date of December 2005 being in place to provide electronic access to Council agenda, minutes and reports, the Council's meetings diary and information relating to elected members. Furthermore, development work is proposed to enable members of the public to take part in on-line consultation exercises and to suggest areas of improvement in respect of Council services.

These developments will improve public access to the Scrutiny function and will provide members with a greater insight into the issues of greatest importance to the Community. It is also envisaged that the community will take the opportunity to engage with the Council in specific Scrutiny reviews.

The Council has formally agreed to sign up to the North East Charter for member development. This commits the Council to meeting a series of benchmark targets and milestones aimed at providing elected members with opportunities to develop their skills as Scrutineers, Executive members, Community Leaders and Community representatives. As part of this process, most members have undertaken a personal development plan interview, the results of which have informed the production of a draft member development strategy. When finalised, the Strategy will highlight the role of members, Directors and officers in providing a programme of training and development events which meet both the Council's agreed priorities as well as the individual aspirations of members.

As part of this process, Scrutiny members have been provided with specialist training by representatives of the Improvement and Development Agency in respect of Scrutiny. Areas covered by the training included:-

- the role of members in the scrutiny process
- the role of the Scrutiny Chair
- Refreshing Scrutiny Questioning skills
- Why Scrutiny Reviews should be undertaken
- The Scrutiny Review cycle
- Best practice examples from other local authorities.

Scrutiny Committee Membership

Members of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee are:

Councillor S. Bishop
Councillor D. Chaytor
Councillor H. High
Councillor A.J. Holmes
Councillor Mrs. E. Huntington
Councillor Mrs. A. Naylor
Councillor D. Raine
Councillor Mrs. B.A. Sloan
Councillor D.J. Taylor-Gooby
Councillor C. Walker
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Councillor W.R. Peardon
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