

Community Services Scrutiny Panel

30th September, 2008

Present: Councillors Howarth (in the Chair), Cowper, Laverick, Lightley, Mavin, Robinson, D Smith, Walton and Young.

Also Present: Councillors Kellett, Stoddart and Turnbull.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Crooks, McDonnell and Mavin.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2nd September, 2008, were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Review of Graveyards

A draft report on the Panel's review of its previous scrutiny of closed churchyards and graveyards had been circulated.

Subject to the correction of a typographical error, it was agreed that this report be passed to the Scrutiny Committee for their consideration.

4. Review of Playing Pitch Strategy

The Council's Technical Support Manager (Environment & Leisure), Streetscene Technical Officer and Policy and Regeneration Manager were in attendance and the Chairman gave a brief recap on the Panel's Scrutiny of the Playing Pitch Strategy for the benefit of those Members who had not been involved previously.

The Panel had previously made a number of recommendations on the pitches, changing facilities, maintenance, signage and working with other organisations and the Council's Officers gave Members an update on progress made towards implementing these.

The Active Durham initiative was now in place with the Community Sports Network and local groups were working with Leisure Services at grass roots level and across all age groups. This initiative was Sports Council funded for three years, and would therefore continue following LGR.

It was considered to be most important that playing pitches were retained following LGR, especially those which were leased to the City Council from organisations such as CISWO. Two or three pitches did not have on site changing facilities, and it was felt that the County Council should be asked to give consideration to provision in the future.

Self adhesive signs had been provided in changing facilities, and a code of conduct and hire agreement was provided when bookings were being taken.

Funding had been made available to have the playing pitches surveyed to recommend improvements that could be made. Some of the recommended works had been carried out over the summer, such as breaking up compacted areas to improve drainage, herbicide treatments, a fertiliser programme and the making up of soil levels and seeding. The survey had also identified pitches where drainage infrastructure required work, but as funding was not available, these works had not been completed.

The legislation governing dogs at now changed under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. A legal process could be followed to introduce a Dog Control Order. Initially all of the Districts would be looking to introduce Orders relating to dog fouling, and in due course they could be made to require dogs to be kept on leads and also banned in certain areas. The new unitary Authority would be looking to introduce these Orders over the next two to three years.

Leisure Services work closely with schools, and schools use Council facilities where they have none of their own. The School Sports Partnership continued to provide facilities.

The City News had been used to try to recruit more sports coaches but the response had been disappointing. Durham University ran sports coaching courses with were also open to residents and this had been more successful.

The Unitary bid stated that standards would be maintained and improved, and it was hopeful therefore that the initiatives in place would further increase demand in the future.

The final review report and recommendations would be considered by the Panel at the next Meeting, and in addition to being forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet, it was agreed that these should also be brought to the attention of the relevant LGR workstreams.

5. Any Other Business

The Chairman informed Members that Council House Repairs would be the topic of the Meeting to be held on 28th October, 2008.

The Meeting terminated at 6.35 pm

Report of Community Services Scrutiny Committee

Review of the Scrutiny of Council House Repairs

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the original Scrutiny as part of the Building Services Best Value Improvement Plan in July 2003, this topic has been reviewed by the Panel on a number of occasions. The last review was carried out in November, 2006, when it was recommended to review Council House Repairs following the introduction of the new computer system, and the opportunity for staff to become accustomed to its use.

2. Actions

- 2.1 The Head of Property Services, Operations Manager, Maintenance Manager and Customer Services Manager attended the Panel's meeting on 7th November, 2007, together with the Portfolio Holder for Communities. Members were advised as to progress made towards meeting the recommendations contained in the last repairs review report.

3. Outcomes

Computer Management System

- 3.1 A new computerised system was installed in June, 2007, and workmen have been issued with PDA (Personal Digital Assistant). After the initial training the system was working well and it could be monitored at the office as to whether tradesmen are on the road, at a job or on a break. The second phase of the computer system is due for installation early 2008. This part of the system will keep records on types of repairs and use a traffic light system to indicate deviation from targets.

Reporting of Repairs

- 3.2 All staff using the new system have received training relevant to their field. It was important not to over load with information but to ensure that staff were confident and competent to carry out their jobs. The importance of on going training was stressed by Members. All tenants have been issued with a handbook which details how to report a repair to Customer Services. Customer Services' staff have been highly trained to identify the type of repair and input the details into the system.
- 3.3 An appointments system has been introduced which allows for tenants' preferences. It is working well.
- 3.4 Members were reminded that reporting of repairs to Council properties should be carried out through the laid down procedure, which is to report the repair to City Info by telephone. By doing this the City Info staff would record the call on the CRM system to enable Members to receive a follow up of the complaint.

Emergency Call Outs

- 3.5 Problems had been experienced with tenants using the emergency call out as a method of obtaining out of hours repairs for one reason or another. When repairs are reported the City Info staff ask a number of questions to determine if a repair is an emergency or not, however some tenants abuse the system. Initial discussions suggested that tenants who abuse the emergency call out system should be charged after receiving an initial warning letter. Members agreed that Cabinet and Officers should consider methods of dealing with this problem.

Response and Re-let Times

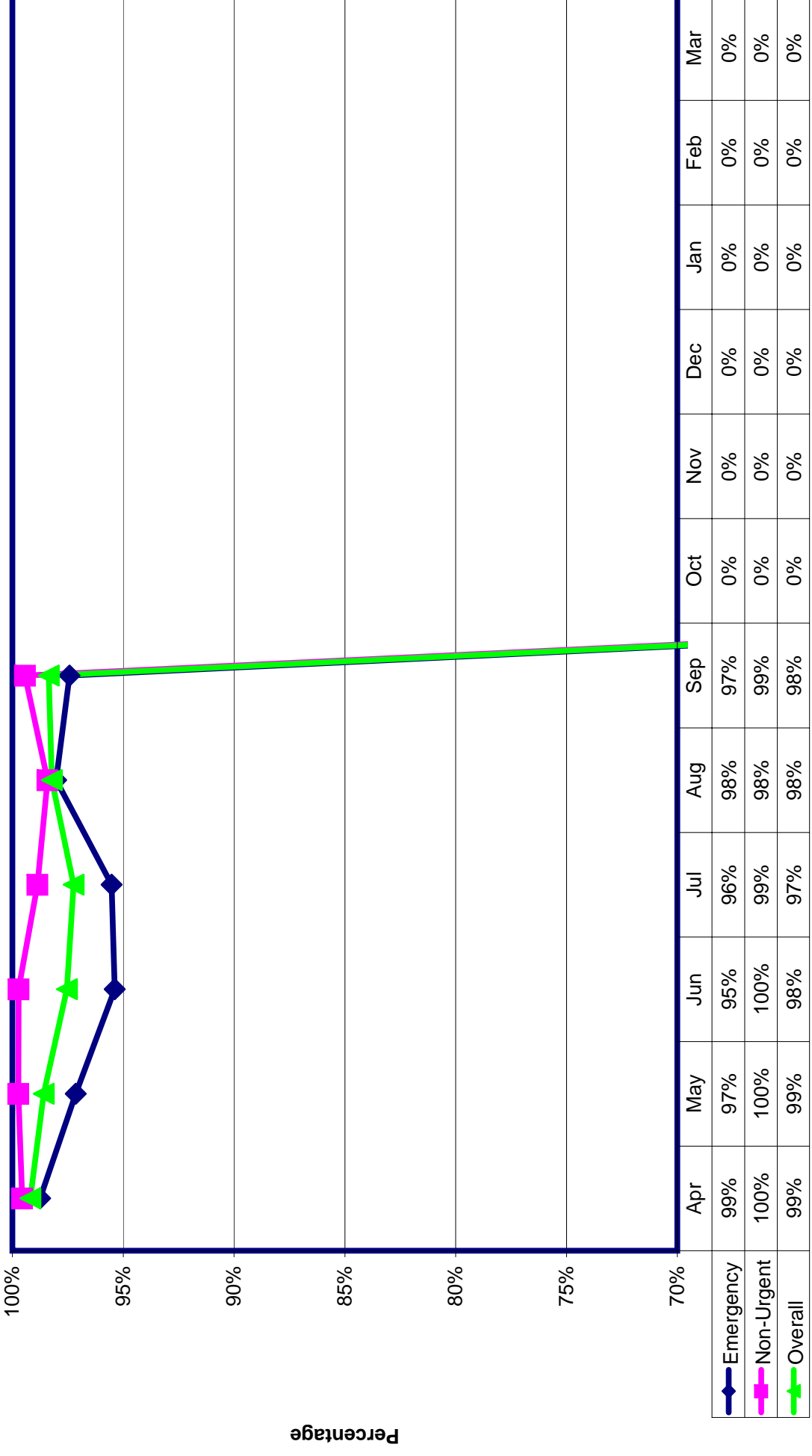
- 3.6 Half yearly figures for responsive repairs are very encouraging as shown at Appendix A. Northgate has acknowledged the considerable achievement of Property Services mastering the new system in a short time scale while still carrying out their day to day jobs. Members reiterated these congratulations.

4. Recommendations

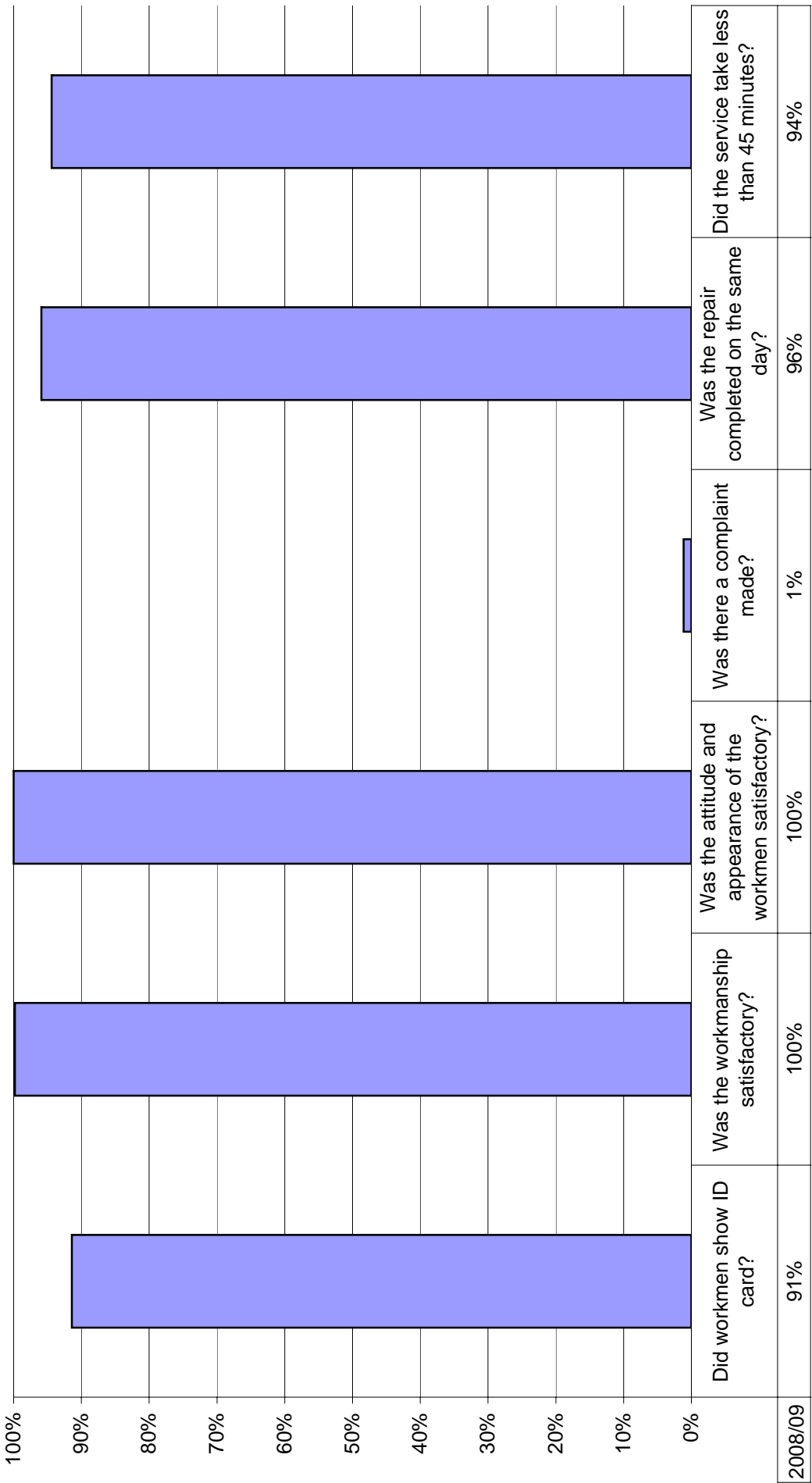
- 4.1 That on going training be given to staff members as required and their commitment be commended.
- 4.2 That procedures be put in place to deter tenants who persist in using the emergency call out repairs service as an out of hours repairs service including the possibility of charging after a warning has been given..
- 4.3 That Members be reminded that whilst it may be appropriate for them to contact Officers directly to gain information, the reporting of customer repairs should go through the recommended City Info channels.
- 4.4 That the Head of Property Services and The Customer Services Manager and their staff be formally thanked for their efforts in bringing about the improvements noted.

Community Services Scrutiny Panel
November 2007

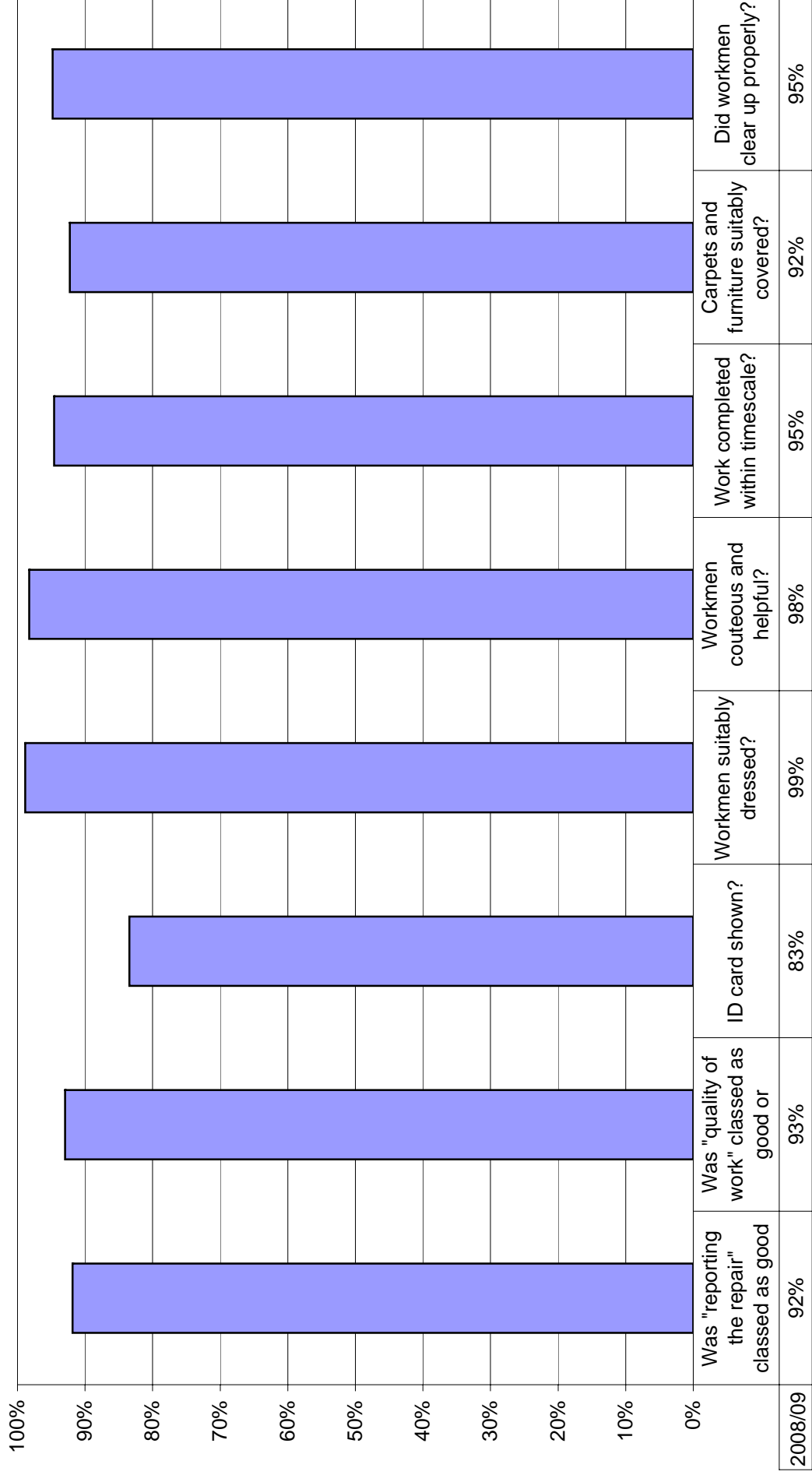
Percentage Repair Requests Completed On Time
2008/09



Gas Service Satisfaction
April 2008 - September 2008



Repairs Satisfaction
April 2008 - September 2008



Details of Appointments made - April - September 2008

	April	May	June	July	August	September	Total
Number of WO raised with appointments	1850	1834	1922	2348	2244	2732	12930
Number of WO raised without appointments	1550	1145	874	810	916	1113	6408
Number of WO raised in month	3400	2979	2796	3158	3160	3845	19338
Number of appointments kept	1318	1338	1629	1813	1744	1826	9668
Number of appointments kept at first visit	1254	1287	1597	1797	1726	1821	9482
	71%	73%	85%	77%	78%	67%	75%
	68%	70%	83%	77%	77%	67%	73%

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

REVIEW SCRUTINY OF THE PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

1. Background

- 1.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned by the City Council, County Council and Sport England in June, 2001. It was initially carried out by external consultants and subsequently completed by Officers of the Council.
- 1.2 Prior to its adoption by Cabinet, the Strategy had been referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration, and they had then passed it to the Community Services Scrutiny Panel.
- 1.3 Promoting the use of Playing Pitches was considered to be of particular importance because of the increased tendency for people to engage in more sedentary pastimes such as watching television and computer activities. Evidence that less physical activity, combined with inappropriate diet, can lead to serious health problems suggested a need for people of all ages to have the opportunity and incentive to engage in more physically active leisure pursuits. Playing pitch sports may also help in combating antisocial behaviour and encouraging community cohesion.
- 1.4 The scrutiny encompassed the views of a wide range of witnesses. In addition to valuable information presented by a number of Durham City Council Officers, meetings also involved Durham County Council's PE Inspector and a Senior Strategy Officer. There was welcomed input from a Primary Care Trust Doctor representing the Health Improvement Group; the Director of Sport of Durham University; the Manager of Durham Schools Sports Partnership; representatives from Durham City Cricket Club and Durham City Football Club; and the Manager of Durham Soccarena.
- 1.5 The Community Services Scrutiny Panel scrutinised the Strategy between October, 2005, and April, 2006, and carried out a site inspection of some of the Council's recreation grounds. This Scrutiny was reviewed in July, 2007, at which time further site inspections had been carried out.

2. Actions

- 2.1 The Council's Technical Support Manager (Environment & Leisure), Streetscene Technical Officer and Policy and Regeneration Manager attended the Panel's Meeting on 30th September, 2008.

3. Outcomes

- 3.1 Progress has been made towards implementing many of the recommendations made by the Panel in their last report.
- 3.2 The Active Durham initiative has been set up with the Community Sports Network. Leisure Services is working with local groups at grass roots level and across all age groups. The scheme is Sports Council funded and will therefore continue after LGR.
- 3.3 Pitches are allocated on the basis of two teams per pitch and reminders are sent to users to enquire if they wish to use the pitch the following season to allow supply to be matched to demand. A number of pitches are not marked out as such where there is no demand, but are available if needed.

- 3.4 Adhesive signage has been provided in changing facilities detailing acceptable use and behaviour, and a code of conduct is part of the hire agreement.
- 3.5 A survey has been carried out to recommend improvements to individual pitches. Capital funding had been sought to improve drainage but the bid was unsuccessful. Compacted areas have been broken up, herbicide and fertiliser treatments have been carried out, and soil levels have been made up and over seeded.
- 3.6 The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 allows Authorities to introduce Dog Control Orders. These can be used to control dog fouling, areas where dogs must be kept on leads, and areas where dogs are banned. As part of the LGR process work is currently ongoing to enable the new unitary authority to bring in an order relating to dog fouling on Vesting Day 1st April 2009. It is the intention that orders relating to areas where dogs are to be kept on leads, or banned, will follow in due course.
- 3.7 The Durham City News has been used to try to recruit potential sports coaches however the response was disappointing. There have however been a good number of Durham University students who have taken up sports coaching roles. Durham University run sports coaching courses which were also open to residents and the response to these was much more encouraging.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Having reviewed the recommendations made in their previous reports, considered progress made towards achieving these, and being conscious that further recommendations need to be relevant to the new Unitary Authority, the Community Services Scrutiny Panel recommend the following.
- 4.2 General
 - 4.2.1 That the recommendations with regard to the promotion of each sport, as made in the City of Durham Playing Pitch Strategy and approved by the City Council's Cabinet, should be actively pursued to further develop pitches and facilities for participants of both sexes, across the full age range, and that the Strategy and Panel's recommendations be forwarded to the new Unitary Authority to encourage use and development of these facilities.
- 4.3 City Council Pitches
 - 4.3.1 That all playing pitches within City of Durham ownership, together with all of these leased to the City Council by organisations such as CISWO, be retained for recreational use.
 - 4.3.2 That in accordance with the conclusions in the Playing Pitch Strategy, the availability, condition and maintenance of all City of Durham owned and administered pitches continue to be monitored and reviewed.
 - 4.3.3 That in accordance with current practice, where a pitch is under used, reasons should be carefully analysed, and with a flexible approach to supply and demand measures to improve take-up should be considered.
 - 4.3.4 That Dog Control Orders be introduced where necessary, and that the necessary signage be provided.

4.4 Changing Facilities

- 4.4.1 That particular attention be given to increasing the availability and improving facilities for female players as and when the need arises.
- 4.4.2 That increased community engagement be pursued to extend the use and concept of ownership and responsibility for premises.
- 4.4.3 That the Hire Agreement and Code of Conduct for use continue to be sent to all those people using the facilities.
- 4.4.4 That the facilities be regularly inspected and appropriately maintained.
- 4.4.5 That in accordance with the present practice, users be asked to either remove all sports equipment at the end of their season, or arrange acceptable storage with the Council.
- 4.4.6 That the new Unitary Authority be asked to give consideration to the provision of changing facilities at those sites where no provision currently exists.

4.5 Maintenance and Drainage

- 4.5.1 That funds be allocated to continue the works already carried out, as identified in the recent survey.

4.6 Working with other Organisations

- 4.6.1 The Panel urge continued and supportive working with partners to fulfil and secure playing pitch needs throughout the District and to maximise participation in sports activities as part of the Active Durham initiative.
- 4.6.2 That the new Unitary Authority be requested to maintain the City Council's close working relationship with Durham University.
- 4.6.3 That close communication be maintained with the School Sports Partnership Manager to explore ways of extending links, shared use and sports promotion to make full use of all facilities.
- 4.6.4 That further research be made into recruitment and training of more sports coaches; this work to be across the County Council, School Sports Partnership and University.
- 4.6.5 That encouragement be given to clubs that currently use Council pitches and facilities, and that where appropriate new joint initiatives be considered.