

# **DISTRICT OF EASINGTON COUNCIL**

## **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2007/8**

# **Scrutiny in Easington**

## **Annual Report 2007/8**

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## **Introduction**

This annual report details the work of the District of Easington's Scrutiny function exercised via the Scrutiny Management Board and the three Scrutiny Committees. It highlights the impact of Scrutiny upon the Councils 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 2007/8 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 2008/9 municipal year.

The past year has continued to see significant challenges for Easington not least of which has been the review of Local Government Structures in County Durham following the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act receiving royal assent. The Council's Scrutiny Committees have concentrated their efforts on ensuring that performance within the Council was improving in terms of service delivery.

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 residents have attended Scrutiny Committees and shaped their work in areas such as the Review of Health services on Teesside and the Council's Recycling and refuse collection service. The Council has recognised the importance of and need to improve the amount of information readily accessible to the public in respect of its decision making process.

The Scrutiny Committees continue to utilise the Council's 'Infopoint' newspaper to promote their work and this has led to a number of public questions being asked at the Council's Scrutiny Committees. We want this to continue and improve and the Council is fully committed to full and open engagement with the local community regarding how and why decisions are made. The Council is committed to improving its community engagement arrangements and this will continue during the coming year.

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. As part of the Member Induction programme which took place following the May 2007 Elections, members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees received bespoke training on Scrutiny for which the Council engaged the services of the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) from University of Birmingham.

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 Colin Patching  
Chair of Community Services Scrutiny  
Committee

Councillor Richard Burnip  
Vice Chair of Community Services Scrutiny  
Committee

Councillor A Burnip  
Chair of Resources Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Joyce Maitland  
Vice Chair of Resources Scrutiny  
Committee

Councillor Dennis Raine  
Chair of Regeneration Services Scrutiny  
Committee

Councillor Edna Connor  
Vice Chair of Regeneration Services  
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 which was amended in May 2007 and consists of:

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

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 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

The Scrutiny Management Board meetings continue to provide the Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, with the information and deliberations of the Executive, when they had made their decisions at their previous meeting. This gives members of the Board an opportunity to pre-empt any potential call-in references or requests for further information when the minutes of the Executive are formally reported to the Scrutiny Committees.

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

- Firstly, it gives non-executive members a chance 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 of the decision of the Executive.
- Secondly, it provides both report authors and the Executive with a valuable mechanism for feedback and challenge regarding their proposals.

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

- Staffing structural reviews - Regeneration and Partnerships Unit
  - Asset and Property Management Unit
  - Planning and Building Control Unit
- Revised Housing Strategy 2007/2012
- LSP Performance Management Reporting arrangements
- District of Easington Gender Equality Scheme
- Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

The Scrutiny Management Board, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Council is also responsible for authorising the waiving of the “call-in” procedures for decisions made by the Executive and deemed to be urgent. The waiving of call-in can only be agreed when both the Scrutiny Management Board and Chairman of the Council are satisfied by the explanations given by the Executive Member and/or Lead Officer as to the reasons behind the urgency of the issue.

The waiving of call-in was agreed by the Scrutiny Management Board in respect of the Renewal of the Contract for the Kerbside Collection of Materials for Recycling and the DCLG Consultation – Local Petitions and Calls for Action.

The Scrutiny Management Board has also overseen the development of County-wide Scrutiny Reviews/Projects in respect of Public Transport and Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS).

## **Developments in the Scrutiny Function in Easington**

In April 2007, the Council agreed the final element of the review of its Political Management Structure, namely the review of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements. In undertaking the review, the Council sought to ensure that:-

- the four key Scrutiny Roles are undertaken
- there are clear opportunities to demonstrate the linkages between the work of the Scrutiny Committee and the Council's agreed corporate priorities and objectives
- there is a balanced and manageable workload between **all** Scrutiny Committees
- there is a demonstrable opportunity to challenge the Executive
- there is an opportunity to realistically engage with members of the public in the work of the Scrutiny Committee(s)
- there is opportunity to develop some specialisation amongst Scrutiny Committee Members in the areas of work which they undertake
- the Scrutiny Committees(s) can deal with cross-cutting issues
- there is a reduction in the overlap between Scrutiny Committee(s) workloads that has been demonstrable on the past
- there is better use of officer support

During the course of the past year, the Scrutiny Committees have improved their challenge of the Executive by systematically reviewing the Council's Forward Plan of Key decisions. Where issues have been identified as suffering from slippage in progress, the relevant Scrutiny Committees have requested progress reports from the appropriate Executive members and sought assurances on how these issues were to be brought back on track.

The Scrutiny Committees have also received feedback reports from the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Committee on the work of the Scrutiny Management Board and how that has dovetailed in with the work programmes of the three Scrutiny Committees.

There has been a balanced and manageable workload between the three Scrutiny Committees with the move to service Unit reporting on an Executive Portfolio basis.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act received royal assent in November 2007 and included a number of provisions on the future rules and function of local authority Scrutiny arrangements not least of which included the Councillor/Community Call for Action proposals and the increase power of Scrutiny in examining Partners and other Public Sector bodies including partnerships such as Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships. Unfortunately, progress on the Councillor Call for Action elements of the Act have been slow, although the Scrutiny Committees have influenced that Council's response to the DCLG Consultation regarding Local Petitions and Calls for Action. Guidance on these issues is anticipated towards the end of 2008.

Following the May 2007 District Council elections, a comprehensive Member Induction programme was provided to new members which included a session on how Scrutiny

operated in Easington. A bespoke member seminar on Scrutiny was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2007 which was facilitated by the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV), University of Birmingham. In adopting this approach the Council is ensuring that members of the Council will be kept fully abreast of the latest National developments in Scrutiny.

## **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

As part of the 2007/08 work programme for the Community Services Scrutiny Committee considered periodic Service Unit Position statements in respect of:-

- Environmental Services
- Neighbourhood Initiatives
- Marketing and Communications
- Leisure
- Revenues and Benefits
- Energy Efficiency/LA 21

As well as the aforementioned reports, the Community Services Scrutiny Committee have examined a number of Policy Development issues which fall within the remit of the Committee.

In considering the Key Decisions identified within the Forward Plan which fell within the Committee's remit, members noted the proposals to review a number of the Council's Refuse and Recycling policies and processes. The Committee started a review by considering the "Waste Strategy for England" which provided a context within which other service development proposals could be considered. The Committee participated in a number of focus group meetings within which community views were obtained on a number of proposals to revise the Council's Refuse Collection policies, particularly regarding side-waste and recycling services.

The outcome of these deliberations was the introduction of a revised side waste policy which has had a marked effect on the Council's statutory Performance indicators regarding litter and detritus.

Following this work, the Committee then examined proposals to change the Council's Kerbside recycling service in an attempt to improve the number and range of recyclables that could be collected and which ultimately would improve the Council's performance in this area. This was set against a backdrop of ever stretching government targets for recycling by local authorities.

Linked to the work being undertaken by the Committee regarding recycling, the Committee along with representatives of Stockton Borough Council attended a site visit to the Premier waste PARC facility at Thornley where members viewed the latest in recycling technology. Unfortunately, adverse press and TV publicity regarding the PARC facility has raised serious concerns about the facility and the CLO product produced by the process. These are to be examined during the coming year.

The Committee has also been involved in the development of the Green Waste recycling service which will serve an additional 17,100 properties from 2008/9 meaning that over 33,000 properties within Easington will benefit from having a green waste recycling service.

The Community Services Scrutiny Committee has also examined policy development work in respect of the Control of Dogs within the District. This issue has become increasingly important as development within the District continued at pace to the extent that existing Dog Control Orders had not followed suit.

The final work undertaken by the Committee in 2007/8 was the Post Office Ltd Network Change programme – Cleveland with South Durham and Richmond. This work followed on from initial consultations undertaken by the Council in early 2007 and which

concluded in the proposal to close the Post Office facility at Hutton Henry. Following consultations with the local Parish Council, the District Council once again made representations to retain the service citing the adverse effects the closure would have on some of the more vulnerable residents of the District. The outcome of these deliberations is expected shortly as is a further round of consultations which may affect the remainder of the District.

## **Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee**

As part of the 2007/08 work programme for the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee considered periodic Service Unit Position statements in respect of:-

- Housing Services
- Planning and Building Control
- Regeneration and Partnerships
- East Durham Business Service
- Environmental Health and Licensing
- Asset Management and Estates

As well as the aforementioned reports, the Community Services Scrutiny Committee have examined the following issues which fell within the remit of the Committee.

Health Services in the District have been the subject of numerous reports and presentations to the Committee. In June, the Department of Health Profiles were published which raised some major concerns about standards of Health within the District. In order to “set the record straight”, representatives of County Durham PCT attended the Committee and reported upon a number of initiatives that had been introduced within Easington that aimed to improve the health of the District’s population.

One such intervention was the new “Healthworks” centre in Easington Colliery and members received presentations from the PCT detailing both the health services to be provided but also services that other public agencies would deliver from the centre.

In August 2007, the Committee resurrected the work previously undertaken in respect of the Darzi review of Acute hospital services North and South of the Tees. Representatives of Hartlepool and North Tees NHS Trust attended to inform members of the “Momentum – Pathways to Healthcare Programme which would see a review of the Health services provided at Hartlepool and North Tees Hospitals as well as paving the way for a new purpose built Hospital to the South of Easington. The meeting was also attended by members of the Public as well as representatives from Hartlepool Borough Council.

Linked to the Momentum project, the Committee examined proposals put forward by County Durham PCT regarding the future of Peterlee hospital. Members heard that there were intrinsic links between the services that could be provided at Peterlee Hospital and the need for robust community health care facilities to support the delivery of a new purpose built hospital as part of the Momentum project.

In March 2008, Carole Langricke from the Momentum Project Board, returned to update members on the progress of the project and inform them of the formal consultation processes that would be commencing in June 2008. At the same meeting, representatives of Durham County Council, the statutory consultee for County Durham in matters of changes to health services, informed the Committee of the proposed methodology for ensuring that the views of the residents of Easington would be taken on board when the Momentum Project was being finalised and implemented.

A number of members of the Public attended the aforementioned meetings of the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee to discuss the issues regarding the future provision of Hospital and Health Services within the District and assurances sought from the County Durham PCT that the District Council and local communities would be kept updated of developments.

## **Resources Scrutiny Committee**

As part of the 2007/08 work programme for the Resources Scrutiny Committee considered periodic Service Unit Position statements in respect of:-

- Corporate Development Unit
- Customer Services
- Personnel and Payroll
- Democratic Services
- Finance
- Information Technology

As well as the aforementioned reports, the Resources Scrutiny Committee have examined the following issues which fell within the remit of the Committee.

The Council concluded its final Best Value Review in 2007 and the final Review report and proposed action plan were examined by the Resources Scrutiny Committee prior to adoption by the Council's Executive. The Committee agreed the review and its findings and were charged with monitoring the Implementation plan. The Review generated efficiency savings of around £75,000.

As part of the Council's three year Value for Money programme, the Resources Scrutiny Committee examined the development of a toolkit which would be used to assist the Council in undertaking its Value for money requirements. The Committee were given presentations on the use of the toolkit and also oversaw the first Value for Money review that was undertaken into the Council's Horticultural services. The review was undertaken over an eight month period and the findings were presented to the Committee in April 2008. The Committee were pleased to note the positive findings from the review.

Following a referral to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee, members received updates regarding the Council's Bus Shelter Maintenance/ Replacement programme following the allocation of £50,000 in the 2007/8 financial year. The Committee were concerned that the resources whilst having been earmarked at the start of the financial year had not been expended. A detailed programme of replacement shelters and repairs were presented to the Committee and copied to all members of the Council.

As part of its 2006/7 work programme, the Resources Scrutiny Committee examined the redevelopment of the Hackworth Road Depot and the rationalisation of the Council's satellite Depots. At the conclusion of the project in 2007/8, the Resources Scrutiny Committee revisited this issue to examine whether the project aims and outcomes had been realised. Members found that whilst the cleared sites had been earmarked for disposal these had not been progressed. However, the Committee was informed that current market values for the sites would exceed the cost of rationalisation. Furthermore, efficiency savings were being realised of £50,000 per year in terms of the satellite depots.

The Resources Scrutiny Committee were also heavily involved in the Budget Framework 2008/9 and the Medium Term Financial outlook 2008/9 – 2010/11. As part of this process the Committee considered:-

- The Grant settlement/Comprehensive Spending Review
- Budget Proposals including Cost pressures, areas identified for additional resources, utilisation of Reserves and Council Tax proposals.

## **WORK PROGRAMMES 2008/9**

In accordance with good practice, Scrutiny Committees must take cognisance of the Council's agreed strategic objectives, priorities and targets when formulating their work programmes. To this end, the Council has supplemented its Corporate priorities with a "transitional plan" for working towards a new County Durham Unitary authority. The Scrutiny Committees will supplement their regular Service Unit Performance reporting with period reviews of the transitional plan and the priority areas identified therein.

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.

## **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

As part of the 2008/09 work programme for the Community Services Scrutiny Committee will consider periodic Service Unit Position statements in respect of:-

- Environmental Services – Lead Officer Paul Penman
- Neighbourhood Initiatives – Lead Officer Steve Arkley
- Marketing and Communications – Lead Officer Mike Lavender
- Leisure – Lead Officer Paul Irwin
- Revenues and Benefits – Lead Officers Alan Stevenson/Charlie Thompson
- Energy Efficiency/LA 21 – Lead Officer Cliff Duff

In monitoring the Council's Transitional Plan, the undermentioned areas of high priority have been identified as falling within the remit of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee:-

### **Issue**

### **Lead Executive Member**

Implement Neighbourhood Working and Community Engagement

Executive Member for Neighbourhood Engagement and Communications

Recycling and Waste Service Improvements

Executive Member for Liveability

Additional Review work will carry over from 2007/8 in respect of:-

- Monitoring the Local Strategic Partnership and its Performance Management arrangements.
- Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme – Area Plan proposal for Easington

## **Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee**

As part of the 2007/08 work programme for the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee will consider periodic Service Unit Position statements in respect of:-

- Housing Services – Lead Officer Ian Morris
- Planning and Building Control – Lead Officer Graeme Reed
- Regeneration and Partnerships – Lead Officer Peter Coe
- East Durham Business Service – Lead Officer Sarah Slaven
- Environmental Health and Licensing – Lead Officer Keith Parkinson
- Asset Management and Estates – Lead Officer Dale Clarke

In monitoring the Council's Transitional Plan, the undermentioned areas of high priority have been identified as falling within the remit of the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee:-

<b><u>Issue</u></b>	<b><u>Lead Executive Member</u></b>
Development of East Durham Trust/ Support to the Voluntary Sector	Executive Member for Regeneration
Developing an Entrepreneurial Culture	Executive Member for Regeneration
Peterlee Masterplan	Executive Member for Regeneration
Support to East Durham Homes	Executive Member for Housing
Housing and Area Regeneration Programme	Executive Members for Housing and Regeneration
Encourage increased levels of Economic Participation	Executive Member for Regeneration

Additional Review work will carry over from 2007/8 in respect of:-

- Momentum – Pathways to Healthcare including the Future of Peterlee Hospital

## **Resources Scrutiny Committee**

As part of the 2007/08 work programme for the Resources Scrutiny Committee will consider periodic Service Unit Position statements in respect of:-

- Corporate Development Unit
- Customer Services
- Personnel and Payroll
- Democratic Services
- Finance
- Information Technology

In monitoring the Council's Transitional Plan, the undermentioned areas of high priority have been identified as falling within the remit of the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee:-

### **Issue**

### **Lead Executive Member**

The Development of Customer Services and the IT support mechanisms

Executive Member for Customer Services

Staff/Member support through Transition to the new Authority

Executive Member for Improvement

Medium Term Financial Strategy to support the Transitional Plan

Executive Member for Resources

## **Scrutiny Committee Membership**

Members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee are:

Councillor B Burn  
Councillor R Burnip  
Councillor P J Campbell  
Councillor Mrs A Laing  
Councillor T Longstaff  
Councillor R Liddle  
Councillor Mrs S Mason  
Councillor D Milsom  
Councillor C Patching  
Councillor T Unsworth

Members of the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee are:

Councillor S Bishop  
Councillor Mrs E Connor  
Councillor Mrs S Forster  
Councillor H High  
Councillor A J Holmes  
Councillor D Raine  
Councillor M Routledge  
Councillor Mrs B Sloan  
Councillor D J Taylor-Gooby  
Councillor C Walker

Members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee are:

Councillor Mrs M Baird  
Councillor A Burnip  
Councillor A Collinson  
Councillor J Haggan  
Councillor A J Holmes  
Councillor R Liddle  
Councillor D Maddison  
Councillor Mrs J Maitland  
Councillor M Nicholls  
Councillor Mrs V Williams

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For further information regarding the Scrutiny Annual Report, please contact any of the above.

key documents/draftworkingdocuments/Scrutiny Annual Report 2007-08