



**BEST VALUE REVIEW OF  
BIRTLEY**

**CONSULTATION REPORT  
MAY 2004**

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## **1. Introduction and Purpose**

The scope of the review identified that its overall aim is to improve services for Birtley residents. To achieve this a range of consultation was carried out with local residents and people working in Birtley in order to establish their views about the area and services provided.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the consultation that has been carried out prior to the review and as part of the review and summarise what this tells us about services provided at Birtley. The identification of residents and other stakeholders views will assist in highlighting key issues regarding the level and quality of services provided. This will assist in identifying where improvements in services are required and any further consultation required.

## **2. Background**

The focus of the review is the geographic area of Birtley and the Council Services provided there. In order to improve services for Birtley residents, consultation has assisted in determining the following:

- Establishing residents views about the area and the services they receive
- Comparing the level and quality of services provided in Birtley with those provided to other areas
- Challenging if the right services are provided and how they are provided
- Assessing whether residents of Birtley are receiving quality and value for money from their services
- Determining if Birtley residents are getting the services they want, when they want them
- What is needed to maintain communities where people want to live and work

The review will not include service improvements to individual services unless they are specific to Birtley or review partners activities.

Appendix A summaries the consultation that has been considered as part of the Best Value Review.

### **3. Mori Information**

Mori was commissioned to prepare a review of available research findings concerning the Birtley review area, which included the following surveys:

- Birtley Residents Survey - January 2004
- Gateshead BVPI Survey - September - November 2003
- Gateshead Council Employee Survey - October - November 2003
- Gateshead Residents Survey - July - September 2002

The review of available research draws on the finding of all of the four surveys to examine how the views and expectations of residents living in Birtley compare with residents from across Gateshead as a whole.

The main findings are as follows:

#### **Satisfaction with Birtley as a Place to Live**

Residents in Birtley are less likely to be satisfied with their neighbourhood than residents in Gateshead as a whole. People who are unhappy with the performance of the Council tend to be more dissatisfied with their neighbourhood. It is owner occupiers who are particularly dissatisfied with Birtley, this may be an indication that the specific mention of the name 'Birtley' has had an impact on responses and that this is a more negative influence for owner occupiers than it is for tenants.

Such dissatisfaction with Birtley is likely to be partly due to substantial differences in opinions between residents in Birtley and those across the whole of Gateshead in relation to policing and in particular crime and disorder among young people. Residents in Birtley are also more critical of the way their area has changed over the last five years compared with residents across Gateshead as a whole.

#### **Attitudes to the Provision of Services**

On the whole, dissatisfaction with service provision in Birtley appears to be low. However in common with other postal surveys, substantial numbers express neutral views about services that they feel little qualified to comment on. Generally speaking, residents are fairly satisfied with education services and with recycling facilities, the collection of waste and street lighting.

From all of the services the level of crime is the issue identified that most needs improving in the area. In 2002 two thirds (64%) of residents living in Birtley said that Gateshead Council should make reducing crime one of their main policy priorities and a third (35%) felt they should make it a top priority.

### **Awareness of Gateshead @ Birtley**

The majority of residents in Birtley say they have at least heard of the "Gateshead @ Birtley" local office. Furthermore almost a third claim to have visited it, while another one in four says that although they have not visited, they have heard of it. Although there still appears to be considerable numbers of residents who have never heard of the "Gateshead @ Birtley" local office. From involvement with residents an explanation for this may be related to the fact that local people do not refer to it as Gateshead @ Birtley, but still continue to refer to it as the library or housing office.

### **Satisfaction with Gateshead Council**

Residents in Birtley appear to be less likely to be satisfied with the way the Council is running the borough than residents across Gateshead as a whole.

One of the main reasons given for levels of dissatisfaction with the council is the perception of some residents that Birtley does not get the full advantages other residents across Gateshead receive.

### **Views of Employees at the Birtley Depot and Gateshead @ Birtley offices**

Most employees based at the Gateshead @ Birtley local office said they are satisfied with their jobs, although a comparison with employees across the whole Council reveals that a higher proportion of employees at this office say they are dissatisfied with their job than the borough-wide total. In addition a higher proportion of employees in this office are critical of Gateshead Council as an employer than is the case across the whole of Gateshead.

In addition to this a survey of all residents in the review area was carried out in January 2004. Specific issues in this research included:

- Satisfaction with the local area
- Desired improvements to the local area
- Satisfaction with council services
- Attitudes towards Gateshead Council
- Knowledge of Gateshead @ Birtley

### **The Local Area**

56% of residents are satisfied with Birtley as a place to live, whilst 24% are dissatisfied. In line with previous consultation a more positive feature of the area in the view of residents is educational standards and learning opportunities along with local health care facilities. Transport services and local housing are also generally well regarded.

Negative perceptions of Birtley, meanwhile centre on the problem of crime and associated concerns over safety. The salience of crime and safety reinforces findings from the Gateshead Community safety Survey, conducted by MORI in

2003, on behalf of Gateshead Community Safety Partnership. That study revealed that around a fifth of residents feel directly threatened by crime and similar proportions feel that vandalism, graffiti, damage to property, burglary and drug abuse are problems in their neighbourhood.

Other sources of dissatisfaction include the quality of life for young people and the cleanliness and tidiness of the local environment.

Consistent with wider research by Mori better policing and improved cleanliness are top amongst residents suggestions on how to improve quality of life for themselves and their families

### **Satisfaction with Services**

Evaluations of different council and non council services vary considerably. At the top end of the scale, waste collection, libraries and doctors surgeries are viewed very positively, as are recycling facilities and street cleaning.

Levels of satisfaction with transport services, including public car parks, the transport network and road safety are more moderate.

The maintenance of roads and streets, efforts to control noise and pollution, parks and open spaces and facilities for young people are poorly regarded overall. In each case more residents are dissatisfied than satisfied with current provision.

### **The Local Council**

Just over half of residents are satisfied with the way the Council is running the borough while a quarter are dissatisfied. Reasons given for dissatisfaction include a perception that Birtley always 'misses out', that residents are not consulted enough and Council Tax is too high.

64% of residents agree that it is easy to contact the Council when they need to, while 12% disagree.

Among some residents there is the feeling that the Council needs to improve the manner in which it engages with local residents. 35% of residents feel that the authority is out of touch with ordinary people in the borough and 27% feel it is too remote and impersonal.

A majority of residents say that while they like to know what the Council is doing, they are generally happy to let it get on with its job. By contrast, 21% said they would like to have more say in what the Council does and the services it provides.

### **Gateshead @ Birtley**

31% of residents had visited Gateshead @ Birtley and 25% of residents have visited the office, although the reason why they visited is not known.

It should be noted that different methodology and sample sizes were used for the research which may have resulted in the responses given. The residents survey was carried out via a self completion questionnaire, whilst the Gateshead residents survey 2002 involved a representative quota as well as interviews.

#### **4. Special Interest Focus Groups**

Focus groups were carried out with several groups within the Birtley area to ascertain more detailed views

##### **Older People**

Focus groups were carried out with members of the Lansbury Drive Residents Association and members of Mount Pleasant Place sheltered accommodation.

##### **Birtley As a Place to Live**

The group of residents from Lansbury Drive felt that the area of Elisabethville has improved significantly due to selective demolition and improvement to the environment.

It was felt that it is easy to access other areas as there is a good bus service from Durham road which provide services to almost all locations.

The local shops are easily accessible and most people do there shopping there. The flower beds and planting along the main road make Birtley a more attractive place.

##### **Issues raised regarding the Shopping Centre**

Although the majority of people use the shops at the town centre, they felt that they could be improved. It was stated that the shops are 'a bit' dilapidated, with several empty shops. The shutters on the shops give an unpleasant appearance. It was felt that there is a lack of investment in the town centre and there is an uneven distribution of money, with more money going to Gateshead's town centre. Shopkeepers need to take more responsibility for their property. The condition of the pavements at the main street, especially outside the Co-op building are uneven and damaged.

Specific reference was made to the second hand furniture on the pavement outside one of the shops and the poor appearance it gives the area.

##### **Issues raised about Young People**

Both groups gave the overall impression that they can be intimidated by young people hanging around and they therefore tend not to go out after dark. However, they were supportive of young people in that they recognised that there is not a lot for them to do. Specific comments made were:

- There is not enough for young people to do
- There should be more youth clubs

##### **Issues raised about Community Safety**

Neighbourhood Wardens do provide reassurance, but there was a lack of clarity about their role and the role of Blizzard. Also the Neighbourhood Wardens carry out patrols but the young people just give them abuse.

The lack of police presence was seen as one of the biggest issues. The action taken against 10-13 year old children appears to be very limited.

The Elisabethville area benefits from an Estate Handy Person and this was seen as very positive with there being an improvement to the appearance of the area.

### **Issues raised about the Environment**

Recycling facilities are good, however the 'Kerb It' recycling facility is not available for the sheltered housing scheme. The issue of unpleasant smells in the area from the sewerage work was raised and the effect on the air quality.

The grass cutting service was raised with regards to the mess left after cutting, especially around the old people's bungalows. The blowing of grass of the path causes more problems as it clogs sinks.

### **Issues raised about Traffic and Parking**

The main road through Birtley is extremely busy, especially when the A1 is blocked. The following areas also cause problems with regards to traffic, traffic flow and parking:

- Tailback of cars at the bottom of Birtley Lane, with drivers often anxious to get onto Durham Road and therefore making dangerous manoeuvres
- Lack of parking on Windsor Road, near the cemetery, with large wagons using the road for access to factories
- Very large fast moving wagons moving through the 'Truckstop'
- Cars parking on the pavement, particularly around the snooker hall, which causes obstructions for people in wheel chairs
- Insufficient parking at Gateshead @ Birtley
- Very few Traffic Wardens seen enforcing regulations

The other issue that was raised was the need for more pedestrian crossings as this would assist elderly people.

### **Issues regarding Contact with the Council**

The introduction of the Repairs Hotline for reporting housing repairs has made it easier to report repairs. However it was felt that the actual service you receive has not improved and there were some individual cases which residents referred to.

Gateshead @ Birtley is better than the old office, however there is insufficient parking.

More information should be included in the Council news regarding local activities rather than separate documents.

There is the need for plain English in meetings and written correspondence.

## **Young People**

Focus groups were carried out with young people of primary school age and older teenagers who were part of organised youth groups.

### **Ravensworth Primary School**

Several children from the School Council had held meetings within class time as well as with individual children to ascertain their views about Birtley.

A key issue raised was with regards to facilities within the area. It was felt that there was limited play equipment at Grove Park and often older children hang around there and have caused damage and vandalism to the area. Generally the area it is not maintained to a standard where they can play football. Other areas (Scots field, Vigo field) where they could play have been fenced off, although older children do still access it.

They felt that there could be more activities provided for young people such as those that are provided by Gateshead Council as part of the summer activity programme.

Most young people do not use the town centre for shopping but travel to other areas such as the Metro Centre. However they did think there was a problem with litter and chewing gum on the main street. Interestingly they felt very strongly about people smoking in public areas and felt it should be banned.

The young people had seen Neighbourhood Wardens in the area but they were not clear about what they do.

Overall the children liked Birtley as a place to live as they felt it was quieter, with out some of the social problems experienced in other areas of Gateshead.

### **Barley Mow Primary School**

A class involved in a discussion about Birtley as a place to live felt that there were limited activities for them to become involved with. There used to be a club at Barley Mow Village Hall which most young people used to attend but this no longer operates.

The park at Dorset Avenue is very poor and they do not use it. The swings need to be replaced and it is dirty, with litter and dog fouling, also fires are often being set alight there.

Several of the children said that they use the Snooker Hall in the town centre as this allows them to hang around together at very little cost.

They are concerned about older children hanging around on the streets especially around the local shops. They feel quite frightened and intimidated by this as often the groups cause trouble and anti social behaviour. They also stated that there is litter around the corner shops.

When asked what they would like to see happen to improve the area, the following issues were raised:

- Improvements to the park, possibly with the development of a new park
- More open space to play football and football facilities
- More Police to help address some of the issues regarding anti social behaviour
- Tidy up the shopping area to make it more attractive
- Removal of litter and graffiti

### **Lord Lawson Youth Group**

Five focus groups were held with groups of teenagers, both male and female. Overall they were negative about the activities that are available to them. They openly stated when there is no youth club on they hang around with their friends on the street. They stated that there was very limited open spaces where they can play football and that they would like full size goal posts. The parks have problems with broken glass and dog fouling.

Although the young people claim to hang about on the street, they stated that do not feel safe on the streets as there are factions between different groups. Also there are groups coming into the area from outside of Birtley and causing problems. They also reported that in certain locations where young people hang out there is drug taking paraphernalia.

The young people are aware of the Neighbourhood Wardens, some young people stated that they stop and talk to them, whilst others stated that they just move them on. The Police also move them on when they are hanging around on the street, however this is often seen as a game.

Some young people use the main street but there is a problem with litter.

### **Birtley Community Centre Youth Group**

20 young men aged between 16 - 19 years of age were involved in the focus group.

The main points they felt were good about Birtley are:

- Birtley sports centre is good but comparatively expensive
- The shops in Birtley are okay

- The computer facilities at the Birtley Community Centre are good

The main issue of the group revolved around the provision of facilities for playing football. There is a lack of facilities for informal games of football and the facilities that exist at Elisabethville and the Welfare Park are poor. The sports hall at Birtley Sports Hall is expensive and is difficult to book as it is well used. They also raised the issue that pitches at Birtley are priced higher than elsewhere in the borough.

There was frustration about the lack of facilities and when they play on the street local residents complain and they are moved on by the Neighbourhood Wardens.

### Parent & Toddler Group

A focus group was held with parents who meet at Barley Mow Village Hall.

There is a need for more parks and playgrounds, as currently there is only limited provision. There is very limited activity for young children, especially activities that do not involve a cost.

Young people are only a problem, hanging around on the street corner because there are no activities for them to become involved with.

They do use the shops at Birtley for their food shopping, but there are limited shops and they are very shabby.

There are issues regarding speeding around the primary school and it was suggested that there is the need for measures to address this such as speed humps.

They do use Birtley @ Gateshead and found it is easy to contact the Council regarding housing repairs. However they thought that improvements could be made with regards to the actual service they received.

Reference was also made with regards to the smells that sometimes occur in Birtley.

### People with Disabilities

5 men with learning difficulties, who meet regularly at Barley Mow Village Hall, raised several issues.

As well as the village hall they also use the swimming pool, the library and they use Birtley Town Centre for all of their shopping. However they think that the pavements are dirty with a lot of litter around. There is also an issue with dog fouling.

Public Transport is good to and from Birtley which allows them to get where they want; Newcastle, MetroCentre, Chester-le-Street or Team Valley. They all have a pass which entitles them to travel for 50p. They feel that the main road is very busy, especially in the morning with school traffic but most of all there are a lot of wagons and buses that use the road.

They don't like the bus stops being damaged and the glass smashed.

## **5. Service Consultation**

A review of consultation carried out by individual services, from January 2000 - January 2004 was undertaken to identify any key issues that had arisen. The following limited information was identified:

### **Community Based Services**

#### **Housing**

Consultation was undertaken with residents of Elisabethville regarding demolition of properties and environmental improvements. This resulted in selected demolition of properties.

#### **Services for Adults with Disabilities**

Discussions were undertaken with careers of people who attend Birtley Centre. This highlighted them wanting locally based inclusive services, with the wish to remain within their local community using local resources.

#### **Community Support**

A participatory rapid appraisal was carried out with residents of Elisabethville and Northside, January 2001. The following key issues were identified:

What do people want / expect from the Birtley area:

- More police, especially on the beat
- More facilities for young people
- More playing fields and parks for young people
- Improvement to the environment

What do people not like about the Birtley area:

- Vandalism
- Smells
- Heavy traffic
- Drugs
- Dog waste

Consultation that was carried out with members of Elisabethville Community Partnership and local residents February 2003, identified the following issues:

What do people want / expect from the Birtley area:

- More facilities for young people
- Reduction in drugs
- Speeding controls
- Recycling facilities
- Pre school facilities for children

What do people not like about the Birtley area:

- No safe play area
- Empty properties
- Derlict factory sites
- Speeding
- Streets need more cleaning

Although there was a significant period of time between the consultation it can be seen how similar issues around facilities for young people, policing, speeding and environmental issues were identified.

### Learning and Culture

A library users survey, 2002 highlighted high levels of satisfaction relating to the service, with no key issues requiring attention being highlighted.

Consultation took place with governors, employees and parents of the schools suggested for inclusion in the PFI. There was general support for the proposals with the desire to rebuild a new school.

### Development and Enterprise

Views of residents regarding the development of a play area and community facilities at the former George Street school site were undertaken by Station Lane Residents Association. The group is now seeking funding to progress the development of a pocket park in the area.

The Quarry Liaison Committee(St Bedes landfill site) consulted regarding the request for restoration proposals. Key issue raised were in relation to environmental issues and the restoration of footpaths and public open space.

Consultation was undertaken regarding the Durham Road transport corridor scheme. Concerns had been raised that there did not appear to be any overall development / transport strategy for Birtley. |The overall transport strategy will be addressed in two stages:

- Transport corridor improvements through the town
- A study of movement s from the A167 to the A1

## 6. Employees Questionnaires

The questionnaire was sent to a range of employees across the Council. In total there were 113 replies, within these replies there were a few who felt that they were not able to comment "on a number of the questions due to lack of knowledge " or because they "don't live in Birtley, don't know". Some based their opinion "on information from locals" acquired whilst working in Birtley.

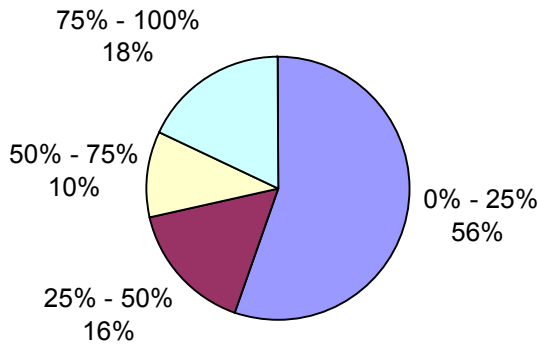
### Range of Employees

The employees who replied were from a wide range of groups and services:

Community Based Services	2%
Not Stated	2
Learning Disabilities Team	
Chief Executive's Department	4%
External Funding	5
Service Improvement	
Central Support	
Policy planning	5%
Development and Enterprise	
Planning and Environmental Strategy	6
Highways and Construction	
Transport Strategy	
Not Stated	11
Finance	
Revenues and Benefits	
ICT Services	
Not Stated	
Internal Audit	
Customer Services	1%
Accountancy	
Human Resources	1
Not Stated	10%
Learning and Culture	23
Education	
Cultural Development	
Not Stated	

Legal and Corporate Services	4%
Electoral Registration	5
Commercial and Development	
Litigation	
Property	54%
Local Environmental Services	
Not Stated	60
Housing maintenance - faults men	
Construction Division	
Stores	
Gardening	
Cleansing & Grounds Maintenance	
Buildings Cleaning Department	
Catering & Cleaning Services	
Home Cleaning Service	
Security	
Transport Service	
Environmental	
School Meals	
Directorate	
Client & Support Services	
Winter maintenance: gritting roads	
Street Services	
Groundcare	

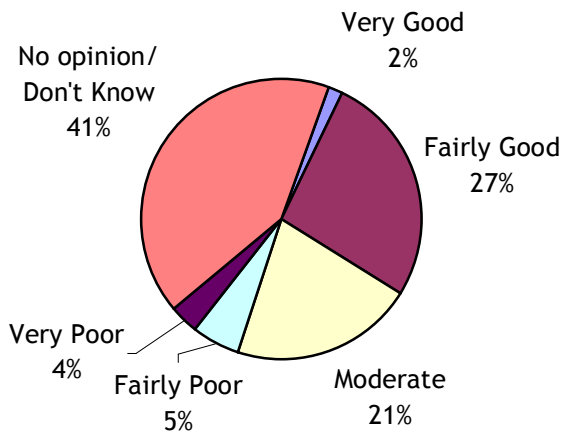
**Proportion of time devoted to Birtley Services**



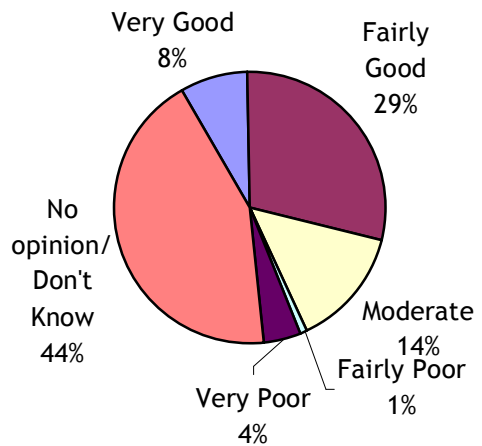
**The Area**

The following show the results of Question 1 which asked how employees rated the quality of 11 features in Birtley:

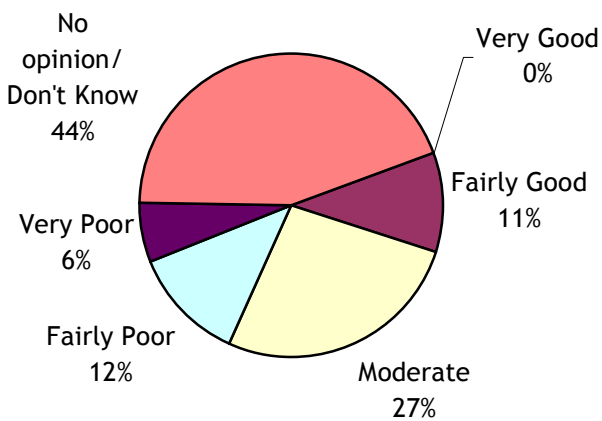
**The choice and availability of housing**



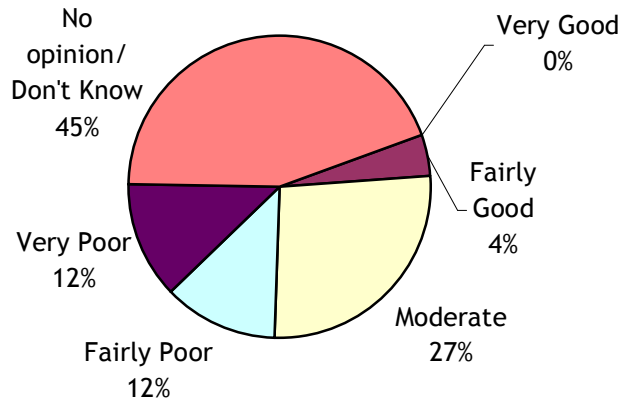
**Access to health care facilities**



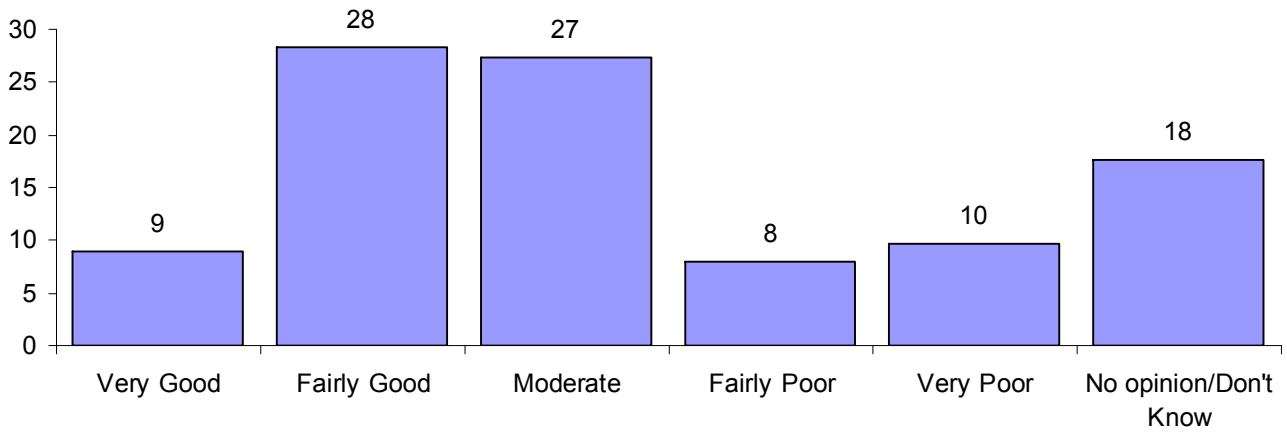
**Availability of jobs and employment**



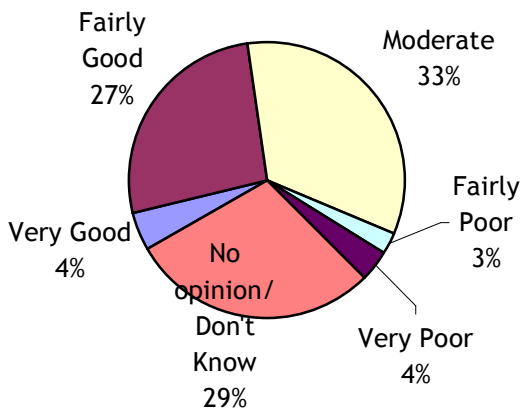
**The quality of life of young people**



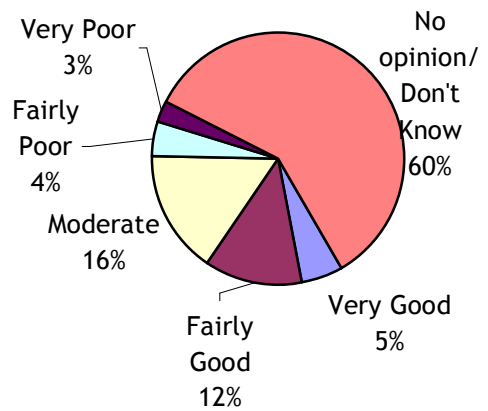
**The local environment, its cleanliness and tidiness**



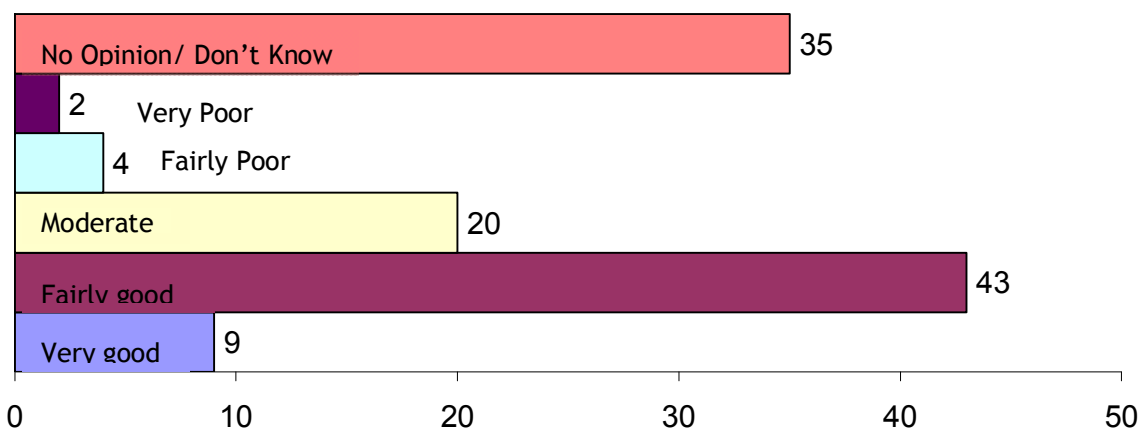
**Availability of sports and cultural facilities**



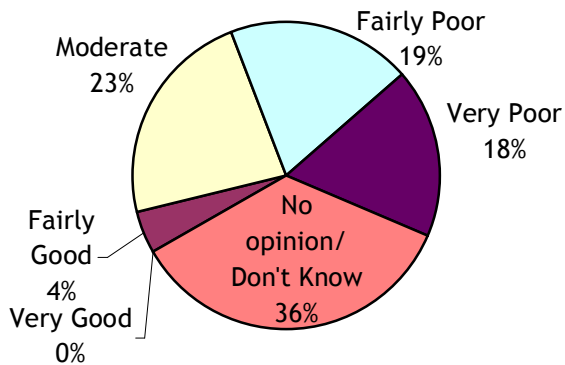
**Care and assistance for people and families with special needs**



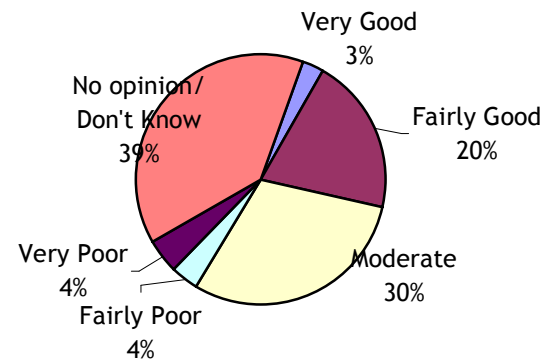
**Educational standards and access to education and learning opportunities**



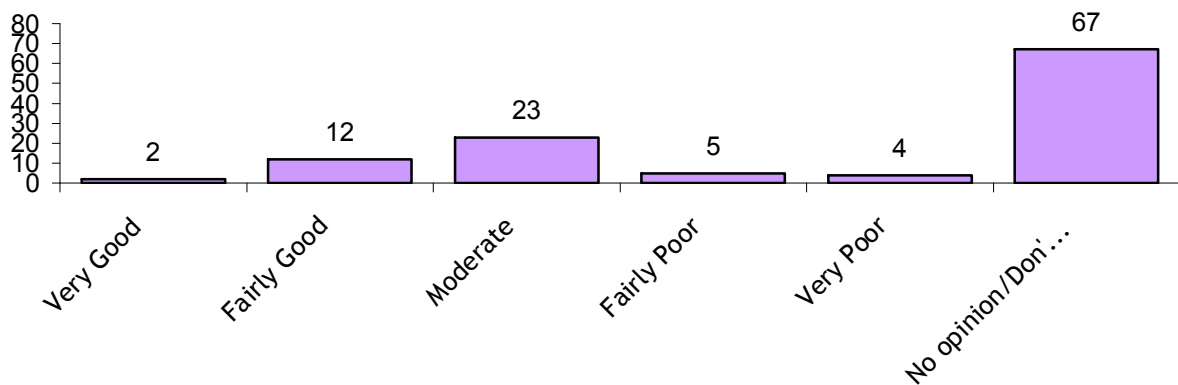
### The level of crime and the feeling of Birtley as a safe place to live



### Safe and affordable transport



### The relationship between people from different cultures



Education standards and access to learning opportunities in Birtley are rated highly along with the sports and cultural facilities available. 64% think that the cleanliness and tidiness of the local environment in Birtley is moderate to very good.

The quality of the majority of features is rated as moderate to very good. Safety within Birtley is a prime concern.

It is to be noted that the majority had no opinion/ don't know about most of the areas mentioned.

Improvements that people would like to see to the features in Birtley are:

- **Community Safety** - People want to feel safer in Birtley through a greater police presence and possibly CCTV cameras.
- **Activities for young people** - They want more activities for young people outside of school, particularly in the evenings to prevent them hanging on streets, going to pubs underage. There is also a feeling that there needs to be more safe areas to play, there are not enough fields for sport i.e. football.

- **Town Centre** - There is a strong feeling that the main street needs to be cleaned up as it occasionally looks unsightly and run down. Improvements also need to be made to the car park (behind Safeway) and the entry/exit to the medical centre.
- **Environment** - It is felt that the general cleanliness and appearance of Birtley needs more attention. The smell from Lamesley Sewage Works was also mentioned. Improvements can be made to the environment by increasing education about environmental issues.
- **Employment and Economy** - Generally there should be more jobs for the unskilled and young unemployed with a space in larger store advertising local jobs. On a Council level, LES employees based at Birtley are unsure with regard to employment depending on the ALMO.
- **Housing** - It is said that the choice of housing is not up to much and a lot of the houses are run-down and in need of modernisation, some are even standing empty. It is felt that the Council needs to abide by tenant agreements more rigorously.
- **Transport** - A more frequent bus service is needed to serve parts of Birtley located away from the main road. This transport needs to be affordable as well as safe. Safety is seen as an issue for some due to groups hanging around bus shelters and only a driver who needs to concentrate on that role.

### **Council Services Provided**

Only 6% of employees feel that the service offered to Birtley residents differs to that of other wards.

Services at Birtley differ by being unique to feeling 'left behind' whilst 'in general it is the same' as other wards.

4% of employees feel that their service is unique to Birtley, whilst 88% do not. This is due to:

- Gateshead Council @ Birtley (referred to as Birtley Library) is only one of two pilot projects for this one-stop-shop approach which enables many different people to obtain excellent quality advice on a large range of matters relating to services provided by Gateshead Council.
- Birtley is the location for one of the two crematoriums in the borough. This leads to a lot more contact on a personal level with local people.

### **Improving services and efficiency**

**Improved communication** was a popular way of improving services as well as efficiency. Communication needs to be improved between departments and partners as well as to the residents about the services available. However, informing residents may increase

demand which would effect resources. Internally, cross cutting information needs to be shared, e.g. Road Safety indirectly links to Parenting Skills.

The **media** used to communicate also needs to be considered:

- For employees, mobile phones may be more useful than radios
- Publish updated reference books with contacts, points of reference and cross-references.
- Provide an informative booklet for local people, given to them by funeral directors, ministers, allocations staff, crematorium staff on service type, grave sections memorabilia etc.
- Advertise the Talking Newspaper more so that potential listeners or groups can be identified and increase circulation.

It has to be remembered that communication is **two-way** and we have to ask residents, including children and young people, what they want - *'you get idea's when talking with people'*.

Whilst Gateshead Council @ Birtley has brought a number of services to the local community it is felt that this could be further improved by:

- Having benefit officers there for **longer periods** (ideally full-time) to reduce waiting time. Officers do not necessarily need to be there in person, the extended use of **technology** would allow residents to speak face to face to someone located at the Civic Centre through video link up facilities. Document image processing would also help.
- Having a **contact** that they can report any suspect **fraud** in confidence. This would give residents the feeling that the Council takes this matter
- Establishing a **local history group** would be useful as there seems to be a demand for this. There are limits to the amount of local material that can be kept at Gateshead Council @ Birtley but there is considerable local history expertise among some staff there.
- Longer opening hours.
- Better access - parking difficult for customers.
- Increase library services available - DVD, Videos, special children's collections, story sacks etc.

The services relating to the **environment** of Birtley could be improved through new ways of working and education. New ways of working would allow work to be completed more quickly:

- The work was issued in a more geographically focused or job-route way - this would reduce travel time.
- Crew Cabs on vans so people are not standing waiting for lifts to jobs
- Change Central Depot into a one-stop-shop type of depot.
- We should educate people who persist in dropping rubbish in the streets, leave dog fouling, fly-tipping and graffiti. This will help the street cleansing services and enhance the look of Birtley.

Education and enforcement is need so that shops do not use the Council litter bins for shop trade litter.

More initiatives and greater access to improve waste disposal and recycling services are needed. Residents could benefit from extending the range of materials available for recycling, e.g. shoe and book banks at sites within Birtley or at Campground (the nearest waste and recycling centre) and a green waste collection service should be implemented.

Also, there are a number of urgent jobs responded to which prove not to be as urgent as claimed upon the workman's arrival. This has been a problem for sometime, a solution to this will improve the service.

Wardens need to be trained to the same level to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The Home Cleaning Service needs to be extended to more elderly residents and better storage facilities are needed for cleaning supplies within communal areas of warden controlled accommodation.

It is felt that a greater Police presence and more wardens are needed to address issues like "gangs of youths who make our lives a misery and they terrify the old people in our area".

The **school meals** service needs to try and serve children food they like as well as it being in the healthy eating bracket. They are currently in discussions with Lord Lawson about improving healthy eating standards.

**Investment** is needed in various areas of Birtley:

- The shopping centre area on Durham Road
- Schools

### **Constraints to improvements**

Obviously more money and resources would help to improve services and efficiency as there would be more staff and better equipment. There is a perception that the lack of funding and resources is due to Birtley being overlooked when in fact the ward has more initiatives and funding directed towards it. However, if 'Birtley gets more, other parts of the Borough must get less!'

Some suggestions like extending the services in the libraries e.g. DVDs could be self-sufficient.

The data protection act seems to protect the rights of the individual but can be used against the community's best interests.

Communication and access issues are currently being looked at through other corporate objectives. Other corporate initiatives that will look at some of the problems are:

- Staff recruitment
- Transport OSC
- Engagement with Hard to Reach Groups OSC
- Asset Management
- Building Reprovision

Many of the environmentally related problems could be improved by more officer time spent in the streets of Birtley in an education and enforcement role. The support for this has been identified as part of the Street Scene Best Value Review.

### **Service User Feedback**

As expected, both positive and negative feedback is received about our services in Birtley. The frontline employees tend to receive more feedback as they are in contact with the user on a one-to-one basis, other employees either receive feedback rarely or 'in my job, never'. Users give feedback through a variety of ways:

**Word of mouth** is the most popular means of gaining feedback;

- **Elderly** - you sometimes get praise from them, sometimes you don't. It depends how they feel from day to day.
- **Residents Association** - Feedback from this group has generally been very positive.
- **Dispersion** - Feedback comes from officers at Gateshead @ Birtley or Elected Members.
- **Telephone calls**
- **Impressions/Reactions** - For example, a day service in Birtley provides a service to various people across the Borough in my experience these service users enjoy the time they spend there and the activities they access from this resource.

Another informal means of receiving feedback is through **letters**, which are fed into the compliments and complaints system. Letters are passed directly to the warden operations manager to persons having used the service.

**Formal mechanisms** are used corporately to assess the services given, the ones used relating to those services provided in Birtley are:

- **Compliments and complaints procedure** is used to highlight any comments from users.
- **Customer Satisfaction Surveys**
- **Quality Control report** - feedback is received regarding the conduct of the person carrying out the work. Asking if the job was carried out in a professional and courteous manner and carried out with minimal disruption.
- **Satisfaction cards** are filled in by tenants which reference the job which has been completed.
- **Feedback document** - recently implemented to assess the warden services. This is completed by the resident(s) and returned to the depot.
- **Visits and inspections** are often performed for services such as the Home Cleaning Service to make sure the high quality standards expected are being met.

- An **evaluation questionnaire** is completed by the school's headteacher on the activities carried out.

**Schools** receive a great deal of feedback from a variety of formal and informal structures:

- regular comments, particularly on open nights.
- parent comments on pupil reports,
- AGM with Gobs,
- OFSTED & other questionnaires,
- School Council.
- Talk to children every day.

Examples of the comments made:

Positive	Negative
<b>Gateshead @ Birtley</b>	
They like accessing council from their own locality	Library users feel taken over by new users of the building.
	Less personal service from staff who are now much busier, need to compromise.
<b>Finance and ICT</b>	
	Regarding Birtley Parish Council precept
<b>Culture</b>	
As part of the Northern Childrens Book Festival one Birtley School had an author visit this year, feedback very positive from school - all children wrote thank you letters to author involved	Some leisure facilities are poorly advertised, do not look appealing from the outside
<b>Education</b>	
The majority is positive particularly in relation to academic standards, expectations of staff care for pupils, extra-curricular activities, breadth of curriculum, participation in initiatives.	Some parents feel too much emphasis on raising achievement - they want their children "to be happy" - feel testing is too much pressure on young children.
	Too much/too little homework, impossible to satisfy all.
<b>School Meals</b>	
Some feedback off some children on food, especially spaghetti	General feedback is mostly about food taken off menu which children like and prefer to other foods
Feedback from children mostly about foods they like and want more often	
<b>Gateshead Housing Company</b>	
Generally the call they have logged has been responded to quicker than they had expected or that it took longer than they had anticipated.	We get complaints from tenants about the length of time it takes to get repairs carried out because of the need for more tradesmen.

<b>Local Environmental Services</b>	
We receive phone calls and letters thanking the lads for the way the work was carried out and the standard of workmanship.	Re. Street cleansing and grasscutting etc.
On the positive side most of our compliments are with regard to the attitude of staff and the tidiness of our grounds.	There are sometimes phone calls about the kerbside recycling collections where boxes have been missed
People thank us for cleaning rubbish away from their homes.	Others complain about rubbish dumping and filth in their streets
Most feedback is positive regarding refuse collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance.	Residents also have expressed dissatisfaction about the waste and recycling centre at Campground when they wish to deposit large amounts of waste material or use large vehicles to deposit waste there. The site is not designed to handle large vehicles/amounts.
Good point - many people, mainly older folk, appreciate the effort to maintain the area horticulturally.	Bad point - people complain mainly about the time it takes to sort out their complaint
<b>Home Cleaning</b>	
<p>They say the service is a great help and staff are very helpful and pleasant. Always rated as excellent or good service.</p> <p>"Thank you very much for the service, we are very lucky to have people who care about us"</p> <p>"My cleaner is very friendly and helpful with a very high standard in all cleaning aspects. Thank you"</p> <p>"Since the cleaning service started life has been a lot easier. My cleaner is so pleasant and really works hard. Thank you for this wonderful service."</p> <p>"I really appreciate the service, it is a great help. Long may it continue"</p> <p>"My cleaner is a very caring lady. She is hard working and very reliable. Thank you for sending her"</p>	No negative feedback has been received.

**Airs service**

A letter was received from a lady who signed up for the talking newspaper at the Birtley library open day, who said she couldn't praise us enough for the informative, entertaining and well presented service, which filled a huge gap for her as she couldn't hold a newspaper very well, so was missing out on news.

**People/groups who could use the service but do not...**

There are no barriers to use but lack of awareness of services available would act as a deterrent.

The library is not used much as it should be by schools in the area. There are access problems because of major roads and the location of schools. Also, many people do not use the CD rental service at the library.

Certain members of the community are still reluctant to phone the wardens for assistance fearing reprisals. The public need to be made more aware of the discretion of the system and the security under which the wardens operate.

There are always a number of pupils entitled to a free school meal who do not stay for lunch.

Many more visually impaired people in Gateshead generally could benefit from free talking newspaper service, if they could be identified.

**Other comments you feel should be considered as part of the review?**

"Generally I think Birtley has improved tremendously in the last ten years. People perception of Birtley is improving".

"Overall I have received a positive impression of the services available to the people of Birtley. The facilities at Birtley library are second to none and the staff who work there are very helpful, friendly and informative and are good ambassadors for Gateshead Council".

**Monitoring**

- I have been involved in the Area Profiles project which has tried to obtain a range of PI and statistical data for the BV area or even by ward. This is not available in the majority of cases. We therefore need to review how data is collected in the first instance and decide if this is desirable/possible.

**Gateshead @ Birtley**

- The library is somewhat hidden in the Gateshead Council @ Birtley building. I wasn't sure that the library was inside on my first visit. I've

also heard from others who have had problems finding the library. Residents often don't realise that libraries are part of the Council.

- Once inside the building, it is pleasant and well laid out. The staff take an active role in trying to promote CDs to their customers and other residents.
- Birtley Library have done a stirring job in promoting our free talking newspaper service to library users, particularly during 'making a noise in libraries' week last year.

### **Individual Services**

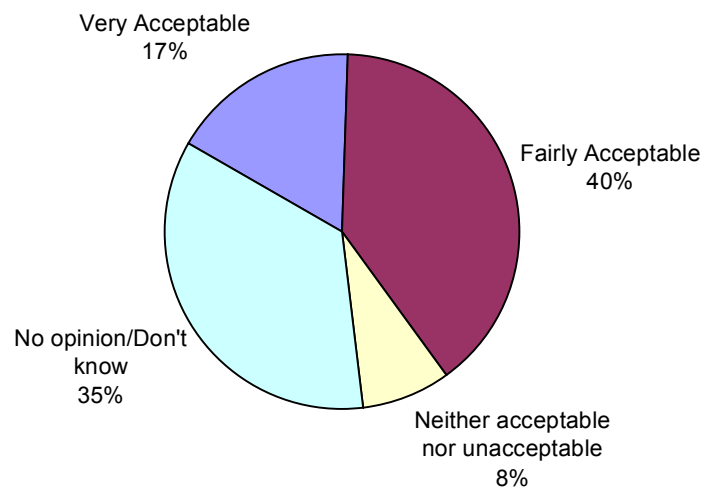
- I feel the home care service I work for should be provided with outdoor wear we have to go out in all weather's to provide our service if it rains we have to go out. We do not get provided with coats or shoes like the male workforce does, they get all work wear provided. We cannot refuse to go out to get our clients pension or shopping if the weather is bad.
- Over 135 elderly residents benefit and rely on the Home Cleaning Service. It is unfortunate that we are restricted to accommodations with on-site wardens as I receive a lot of interest from other residents who would like the service.
- Adopted Highways in Birtley are inspected and repaired in exactly the same way as elsewhere in the borough.
- LES ought to be able to provide estimates & invoices for repairs etc to the same level as private companies
- We need a better communication system, i.e. mobile phones
- Availability of memorials and a dress code for Crematorium Staff.
- General Environment
- Birtley High Street is not very appealing; some buildings could do with renovation.
- I would like to comment on the unacceptable smell that lingers over the whole of Birtley in the summer coming from the direction of Ouston. Everyone has to keep doors and windows shut for some considerable time - I think it is a health hazard for everyone living and working in Birtley
- Birtley High Street should have cameras because it is not a safe place. Every week there is glass all over the streets and rubbish dropped. This is not the fault of the street cleaner but people.
- The parks in Birtley are disgusting they have NO play areas and it is not safe for children to go as there are gangs of youths who break everything.

- Birtley appears to be a hot spot within the borough for graffiti
- Security presence at weekends.

### Contact With the Council

57% of employees believe that the quality of services provided by Gateshead @ Birtley is acceptable.

#### Quality of the service offered from Gateshead@Birtley



Suggestions for further improvement are:

- Constant evaluation
- Extend office opening hours
- More staff on front desk trained to the right level
- Additional employees
- More training to staff
- Communication and promotion.

## **7. Councillor Questionnaire**

A self-completion questionnaire was sent to all Councillors within the Council. The responses received were poor (6%), an explanation given for not responding was that their knowledge of Birtley was very limited.

From the information provided the following key points were raised:

### **Services**

The response to cleanliness and tidiness of the local environment was mixed. 25% thought it was fairly good whilst 50% believe it to be moderate, the remaining 25% scored it as poor. Comments associated with this question realise that Local Environment Services (LES) do an excellent job cleaning the main street. However, litter is still a problem, with street cleanliness deteriorating in many local areas away from the main street. It was suggested that more frequent sweeping and more frequent checks of the area would improve this.

It was also highlighted that the environment has suffered from large scale tipping for many years. Now that commercial tipping has ceased, Birtley is troubled by fly tipping and derelict sites. It was felt that enforcement actions should be taken here.

The majority (75%) of responses indicated that the availability of sports and cultural facilities as fairly poor, with 25% rating it as moderate. The following comments were made in relation to improving this situation:

- Need to provide more affordable facilities within schools and community centres
- Sport provision is alright but there is a lack of cultural facilities. It was suggested that there could be visits to local community centres or assisted travel to local/ regional theatres. Alternatively more art/exhibitions could be supplied to schools, libraries and community centres and made available at a low cost.

50% rate the level of crime and the feeling of Birtley as a safe place to live as fairly good whilst 25% perceive it as fairly poor or very poor (25%). One member said, " I know that statistics show that crime is not as bad in reality as it is perceived, however we need to retain an effective presence

with the community wardens, advertising them along with the Police and Blizzard with the community".

### **Strength and Weaknesses**

Councillors were provided with a list of services within Birtley that were covered by the review. They were asked to identify services that they thought were done well and those that they thought needed improvement. Waste collection and recycling facilities are seen to be done well by all of the councillors. They would like to see improvements in the maintenance of roads and streets as well as enforcement of planning controls.

When asked to identify how they could improve services in Birtley the following comments were made:

- Reduce or change policy that causes traffic hold up by unnecessary traffic lights
- Parks have little in the way of equipment, vandalism is common
- More facilities for young people
- Pollution and noise from Lamesley sewerage works is an ongoing problem
- There are few if any cultural facilities /events in the town

A key issue that was raised under other issues was the shopping centre, with the need for it to be considered for redevelopment to maintain local support

### **Gateshead @ Birtley**

Councillors stated that the quality of services offered from Gateshead @ Birtley were acceptable and fairly acceptable. The only improvement mentioned was the consideration of extending the range of services available from there, if not in full then on a part time basis.

### **Key Issues**

The questionnaire suggests that the following areas should be looked at:

- Regeneration of the town centre
- Sports and cultural facilities
- Education on equality and diversity
- Litter / fly tipping
- Planning Control Enforcement
- Maintenance of roads and streets
- Transport network

## 8. Young Peoples Questionnaire

A young person of Respect Birtley devised and carried out a questionnaire with fellow young people, the findings were as follows:

35 young people completed the questionnaire, 25.7% were aged between 8-10, 40.0% were aged between 11-14 and 12% aged between 15 - 19.

54% were either very or fairly satisfied with Birtley as a place to live.

When asked what three improvements would make the biggest difference to the area, 37.5% stated improved parks, 12.5% more facilities, 9.4% wanted full size goal posts, 9.4% more places to go and 6.3% said tidy the place up.

When asked about Gateshead @ Birtley, 38% had heard of it with 11.8% having visited it, but 58.8% had not.

When asked what facilities they would most like to try in their area the key responses were as follows:

Karting	51%
Decks	54%
Outdoor activity	40%
Skate park	31%
Sports	29%

## **9. Interviews**

Interviews have been carried out with representatives from services that have emerged as priorities for local residents.

### **Northumbria Police - Chief Superintendent Alan Curry**

Over recent years there has been a development of the 'Extended Police Family'. This includes Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Neighbourhood Wardens.

There appears to be a clearer role for PCSOs. These are funded 50:50 by the Home Office and Northumbria Police Authority and are under the control and direction of the Police. They communicate with Police Officers by operating on the same radio system. They do not have full police powers but do have the power to obtain the names of individuals (such as youths causing disturbance). However PCSO's do not operate in the Birtley Review area.

The role of Neighbourhood Wardens is less clear. They do not work as closely with the police as the PCSOs and are not in contact with the same radio system. Their presence can stimulate extra demand on police services, that are already stretched, by reporting crime and other issues. However, it is recognised that the Wardens could be a useful resource and what is really needed is the development of working protocols between them and the police.

There is an issue of young people hanging around the streets and some people find this intimidating. However, they are generally not breaking the law and the police can only move them on.

The groups of young people are intimidating because of the numbers involved. It may be that the size of the catchment area for Lord Lawson school has an influence on this as young people then travel back after school to hang around with their friends.

Another issue in Birtley is that local facilities, such as the sports hall, are often booked up by people, often from outside of the area, and are therefore unavailable to locals.

It is important that efforts are focussed on the right area. Chief Superintendent spoke highly of the boxing club in Birtley. Police officers are involved in the boxing club in Birtley. This is very positive as it is more than simply developing boxing skills for boys. It is available to a wide range of people and encourages a healthy lifestyle.

Overall there is co-terminosity between local authority areas and police areas and we now need to move forward and further develop the co-ordination of local services.

### **Tyne and Wear Chamber of Commerce**

Discussions with the Chamber of Commerce revolved around the perception that the shopping centre in Birtley it is in decline. The Chamber of Commerce may be able to work with the Council and with local traders to reverse this perception.

They are working with traders in the West End of Newcastle as part of the West End Business Forum. This forum is directed by a steering group of local businesses who are keen to see the prospects of the West End improve.

Their mission statement is 'To assist the development of a sustainable business environment for Newcastle West End and that the Business Forum itself is led by business people for business people'.

The forum has tackled particular problems that exist in the West End and it may be that similar work can be carried out with businesses in Birtley.

## **10. Gaps in Consultation**

As reported a wide range of consultation has been carried out to try and ascertain the views of local residents. In addition to questionnaires, detailed focus groups have been undertaken with specific groups.

Further focus groups will be carried out with local residents and employees who have expressed an interest in being involved in the Best Value Review to explore their views on the initial findings.

A key issue that has arisen is with regards to activities and facilities for young people and the view that there is a lack of provision. However information that has emerged as part of the audit and comparison of services demonstrates that there is a range of facilities and activities in the Birtley area. Therefore it appears that activities that are being provided are not meeting the requirements or needs of young people.

It has been proposed that further consultation may be required with young people to ascertain what activities and provision they would like to be provided. Initial discussions are being carried out with school Heads to ascertain their commitment to assisting in carrying out such a piece of research.

## **11. Conclusion**

As a result of the consultation that has been carried out and the key issues that have arisen, 5 key areas for further investigation have been identified, which are as follows:

- Young People
- Environment
- Town Centre
- Community Safety
- Contact and Communication with the Council

Within each of these issues the key points that have been identified as part of the consultation have been identified and investigations undertaken. Further details are available within each of the separate reports.

## Appendix 1: Summary of Consultation

Consultation	Date
<b>Questionnaires</b>	
Birtley Residents Survey	January 2004
Gateshead BVPI Survey	Sept-Nov 2003
Gateshead Council Employee Survey	Oct-Nov 2003
Gateshead Residents Survey	July-Sept 2002
Young Peoples Survey	Feb-May 2004
<b>Focus Groups</b>	
Older people - Lansbury Drive Community Bungalow Residents	28 <sup>th</sup> January 2004
Older People - Mount Pleasant Place	9 <sup>th</sup> February 2004
Young People - Birtley Community Centre Youth Group	10 <sup>th</sup> February 2004
Young People - Lord Lawson Youth Group	12 <sup>th</sup> February 2004
Young People - Ravensworth Primary School	2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2004
Young People - Barley Mow Primary School	27 <sup>th</sup> February 2004
Learning Difficulties - Barley Mow Village Hall	5 <sup>th</sup> February 2004
Young Parents - Barley Mow Village Hall	9 <sup>th</sup> March 2004