

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

30<sup>th</sup> October, 2006, Town Hall

Present: Councillors: Hopgood (in the Chair), Colledge, Cowper, Graham, McDonnell, Pape, Shaw, Simmons, Simpson and Stoddart

Also Present: Councillors: Gibbon, Howarth, Kellett, Kinghorn, Marsden, Smith and Turnbull; Mrs Melanie Sensicle Chief Executive of Durham Tourism Partnership; Mr Tom Keating Independent Tour Guide; Ms Tracey Ingle Head of Cultural Services, City of Durham; Mr John Tindale Community & Economic Development Manager, City of Durham.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gill

**2. Minutes**

Minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2006 were agreed as a correct record.

**3. Scrutiny Of Tourism**

The Panel continued their scrutiny of tourism. Melanie Sensicle, Chief Executive of Durham Area Tourism Partnership addressed the panel giving a little background on herself and how she came to be Chief Executive of Durham Area Tourism Partnership.

Mrs Sensicle informed the Panel that the City had not yet reached its full potential, which the City had to compete with strong tourism destinations – York, the Lakes and Scotland. It was important for the visitor to enjoy a good experience during the visit and to keep in contact with the customer for marketing purposes.

When customers buy a holiday they are purchasing an experience and it is up to the destination to give the customer reasons to return.

Mrs Sensicle informed Members that the Tourism Partnership was working closely with Cultural Services and that the City had entered in with a national consortium to attract the North American market, other cities in the consortium are York, Bath and Canterbury.

Councillor Pape asked a question relating to the visitor experience and suggested that Durham City had a separate identity from York and therefore the experience would be different.

Mrs Sensicle informed Members that when customers in North America planned a trip it would be in the first instance to Europe, and then they would choose various cities to visit. Durham City has been presented with a group of cities of British heritage.

Councillor Gibbon said that there was no connection between places so visitors would find it difficult to perceive how far an attraction is from the centre. Councillor Gibbon suggested that a leaflet could be designed in terms of a wheel with Durham City at the centre and attractions in the villages as spokes of the wheel.

Councillor Stoddart informed Members that many trains did not now stop at Durham and this would make it difficult to promote Durham to visitors. Mrs Sensicle said that this would need to be tackled at strategic level and would involve One North East. She went on to say that transport links were difficult to work with and had had lots of experience of dealing with problems with buses and trains. Councillor Stoddart also informed Members that the bus from Durham to Beamish had been cancelled and this would affect tourists coming into the City. Members informed the panel that many buses have cancelled routes in the area.

Councillor Howarth had asked how would the contact with the customer be made. Mrs Sensicle advised that information is gathered through marketing methods via technology and marketing segmentation.

Councillor Pape suggested that alumni would return to the City from time to time. Mrs Sensicle informed Members that there was close links with the University and that the further away from the time of graduation the more nostalgic people became.

Mr Tom Keating, a Blue Badge Independent Tour Guide addressed the Panel. He advised that he was a freelance impartial ambassador for the North East and that he felt his job was to enhance a visit and give a reason for visitors to return. Mr Keating had given 120 tours in Durham City most were half day visits and the main attraction was Durham Cathedral. However, Mr Keating did inform the Panel that people who were on Christian Heritage visits were missing out on places like St. Lawrence's Church at Pitlington and St. Helen's Church at Kelloe.

Mr Keating acknowledged the work of the Tourist Information Centre but suggested that more information (in leaflet form) could be given out on the village attractions such as parish churches.

Mr Keating also suggested that better use be made of the park and ride and Cathedral bus to stop at places of interest in the City but that a difficult to get to, e.g., Botanical Gardens, The Oriental Museum and Crook Hall.

Mr Keating criticised the signage in Durham especially that of the TIC. The Head of Cultural Services informed Members this problem was currently being addressed but once the Walkergate Development is open then visitors will pass the TIC on their way from the coach park.

Mr Keating advised that businesses had to be serious about tourism and consider whether it was still appropriate to have half day closing, to close at 5.00 pm.

Councillor Stoddart informed the Panel that the Castle closed to the public at 5.00 pm.

Councillor Hopgood suggested that the Christian Heritage theme should be promoted on a regional basis.

Mr Keating criticised poor co-ordination of events, and communication via the web site and in the press of events, also to make the most of the riverbanks.

The Head of Cultural Services informed the Panel that there was now an Events Co-ordinator who would liaise with various sources and communicate with relevant bodies to promote the activities. She also informed Members that the Necklace Park which was a 12 mile stretch of footways between Finchale Priory and Sunderland Bridge would be officially opened at Easter 2007, the Necklace Park would be much more than riverside walks, and would include activities on the river and the possible use of private facilities along the waterside.

**Note:** Councillor McDonnell left the Meeting 6.30 pm.

Councillor Colledge informed the Panel that public facilities were not open before 9.00 a.m. and that visitors do not know about the Town Hall. The Head of Cultural Services advised that the Town Hall was due for refurbishment and the needs would be discussed. Most of the public facilities in the City are privately owned and this would be a matter to take up with the private owners.

Councillor Marsden suggested that new walks should be sign posted in the villages, that residents should be informed of the existence of the footpaths.

The Chair thanked Mrs Sensicle, Mr Keating and the Head of Cultural Services for their attendance and the information they had given to the Panel.

**Note:** Councillors: Kellett; Marsden and Turnbull, Mrs Sensicle, Mr Keating and the Head of Cultural Services left the Meeting at 6.35 pm.

#### **4. Incentives to Small Business**

The Economic Scrutiny Panel reported on the Economic Analysis in June 2005. The Chair had asked that the Community and Development Manager to give an update current position relating to grant applications, approvals and refusals.

The Economic & Community Development Manager informed the panel that they were currently two business grant support schemes one which solely related to SRB6 areas and the other for all other areas. The grants mainly dealt with business start up for sole traders. The budget for the grant was £23, 000 this was made up of £15,000 from SRB and £8,000 from the City Council funds. The budget for all other areas was £25, 000 made up totally from City Council funds.

The maximum grant which could be received was £500.00 plus the applicant would receive advice on financial planning, e.g., the setting out of a business plan. The aftercare service was an opportunity to build a relationship with the applicant.

In the last 12 months 60 applications had been received, 25 applications from SRB6 areas and 35 from areas other than SRB6. 28 applications had been approved; 3 had been declined and 29 were currently in the system awaiting a decision or more information.

The 3 that had been refused were applications where the business was not within the district. The Economic & Community Development Manager informed the Panel that the survival rate was the most important factor.

The Economic & Community Development Manager informed the panel of a programme run in conjunction with local schools and local business with LSP policy groups called Future Business Magnets. Year 8 pupils work with a business partner ideas in theory. Some of these businesses are up and running on school premises. There are 9 Schools taking part in the initiative together with 9 high profile business partners.

The Chair and the Vice Chair were encouraged to see that 90% of applications were being approved and of that 90% a further 90% were managing to survive a period exceeding 18 months.

The Chair thanked the Economic and Community Development Manager for his attendance and the information given to the Panel.

The Panel agreed that they were content with the progress that has been made.

A report detailing the review would be submitted to Scrutiny Committee in December 2006.

The Meeting Terminated at 6.45 pm