

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

13th May, 2008 Mayor's Chamber, Town Hall

Present: Councillor Hopgood (in the Chair) and Councillors Colledge, Lightley, Marsden, Plews, Smith and Stoddart

Also Present: Councillors: Kelly, Kellett and Wolstenholme
Councillor Pitts Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture
Miss T A Ingle Head of Cultural Services, City of Durham

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Guy, Simpson, Walker and Wilkes.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th April 2008 were agreed as a true record.

3. Review of Scrutiny of Tourism

The Head of Cultural Services apologised to the Panel for not giving 3 monthly updates but informed the Panel that the Tourism Strategy is covered by the Durham Tourism Partnership and does not change from month to month but over the course of years. The Head of Cultural Services advised that the operational side of Tourism may be of specific interest to the Panel.

The Head of Cultural Services advised that the information boards at the Park and Ride were used and information adverts were used on buses. The Chair advised the Head of Cultural Services that she had noticed that at the railway station that the information display was appalling and tourist arriving in Durham via the railway station would have no information. The Head of Cultural Services advised that was part of current issues that are being investigated. Members were also informed that it was planned to offer a meet and greet service for coaches coming into the City, and it is the intention to move the drop off point from the bottom of the Market Place steps to Walkergate and that coaches now received free parking. This would be better for coach parties as they would gain access to the City via Millennium Place using either the steps or the lift therefore placing them in the vicinity of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC).

Members inquired whether the Cathedral bus or the Park and Ride buses could be used to drop visitors at various places of interest within the City. Members were advised that it was unlikely for either the Cathedral bus or the park and ride buses could divert their routes. Members also were concerned at the amount of trains that fail to stop at Durham. Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture informed members that this was of great concern not only for tourism within the City but also for business. Members were informed that the M.P. was working on this issue and that some buses are not stopping in Durham.

The Head of Cultural Services advised Members that there was a close working relationship with the Durham Tourism Partnership, they also have a good working relationship with the Dean and Chapter and the University, the World Heritage Site co-ordinator is employed by the University. The World Heritage Site pulls all the stakeholders together. Also the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) has representatives from all partners which is very helpful as partners can advise on issues which may have an affect on proposed events.

Members recalled a 'What's On' guide that had been published, giving details of events in and around the City. Members were informed that there was not available funding to

support a 'what's on guide', but an online version was available, this would give details on specific interests and the TLC would print out relevant details for customers. Members were informed that Durham City Vision are currently working on an online information of events, this information would be shared.

Members were concerned that not everyone has access to internet or IT facilities and that a display service should be available at the sports centres. Members were advised that TIC or City info sites should be able to provide information to members of the public. The Head of Cultural Services advised that Durham FM and Durham Times helped to publicise events this was a step forward.

Members were informed that tourism continues to work closely with all partners. Funding has been acquired from Culture 10 for a Durham City Vision event which will take place later this year. This is a major coup as most of the culture 10 funding is directed to events in Newcastle and Gateshead. Information was given to members about forthcoming events and about the reintroduction of the Durham Mystery Plays.

Members were concerned about the amounts of empty shop units in the City and were especially concerned at the closure of Waitrose in the Gates. The Head of Cultural Services advised Members that the retail experience should match the heritage experience. Members were advised that the Durham City had won best Group Travel destination in UK.

Members were advised that signage issues had not moved as quickly as intended – better mapping was required – daytime mapping was obviously different to night time mapping as the focus moves from one part of the City to another.

The Head of Cultural Services advised Members that she had not yet asked all members for attractions within their wards but intended to do this. Also the areas stated would have to be investigated for safety and land ownership.

The Chair asked if the information booklets were regularly updated and was advised that an annual update and reprint is carried out, a more frequent update and reprint would not be cost effective.

Members were advised that formal tours of the Town Hall would commence but would require discussion, when asked if there would be an area in the foyer of the Town Hall where gifts could be purchased the Head of Cultural Services advised that there would be no designated area, purchases could only be made at the TIC. Members were advised that the Town Hall Manager has been appointed and will create a business plan. The Town Hall will be used in a new way.

The Head of Cultural Services informed Members that the new Raddison Hotel would be opening later this year and its existence had motivated the Marriott Hotel to make improvements. It is hoped that the Three Tuns would do the same. Members were informed that the Travel inn is the most popular hotel when taking turnover into account, also there is a boutique hotel in South Street. The hotel market in the city is vibrant and competitive, at certain times of the year there is no available bed space.

Members were advised that it is hoped that there would be a continuation from the switching on of the Christmas lights through to the Christmas festival.

The Chair asked what happens to the visitor feedback information and was informed that the feedback was high approximately 80 %, visitors liked the City because it was friendly and easy move around but did not like the signage and the toilets. On the whole they were pleased with the service they received.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Cultural Services for there attendance and suggested that the recommendations had been carried out but the feedback mechanism had not been in place.

The Chair Advised that a representative from the Durham City Vision and the City Centre Co-ordinator would be invited to the next meeting.

Meeting terminated 6.45 pm