

**PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 21 NOVEMBER, 2006**

**REVIEW OF EAST DURHAM LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

**SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE, RICHARD PRISK, DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT, DISTRICT OF EASINGTON COUNCIL AND CHAIR OF THE ECONOMY SUB GROUP – ECONOMY SUB GROUP**

**(i) What was the role of the Sub Group within the LSP and which Members/Officers from the District Council supported it?**

R Prisk explained that the group was thematic for improving the economy of East Durham. The principle roles of the group included:-

- developing and promoting a dynamic East Durham economy;
- generating employment opportunities;
- stimulating investment to benefit the local population and the business community;
- promoting a partnership approach and supporting sustainability;
- developing opportunities for business starts to support business growth;
- developing a modern business infrastructure and promoting employability.

Partners included Acumen Development Trust, Community Empowerment Network, County Durham Jobcentre Plus, Easington Primary Care Trust, East Durham and Houghall Community College, Business Link County Durham, Connexions, East Durham Partnership and Durham County Council.

There were several officers who supported the Economy Group including Sarah Slaven, East Durham Business Service Manager, Stephen James and Heather Lang, Economic Development, and John Murphy, the LSP manager. Additional officers from Regeneration and Partnerships also attended as necessary.

**(ii) Where had the Sub Group been most effective so far?**

The Economy Group had been most effective through the development of its priorities/targets and the development of initiatives implemented to tackle these issues, such as employability and worklessness. As a result the progress against local targets including incapacity benefit claimants and new start businesses were above targets and enabling positive outcomes for the community of East Durham.

Effective collaborative working could be demonstrated through the development of the East Durham Employability Action Plan (June 2006) supported by partners. The progression of the Action Plan led to the formulation of an employment team based at Acumen Community Enterprise Development Trust. A sub group of the Economy Group, East Durham Employability Task Group was responsible for developing the

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Action Plan, monitoring the activity of the employment team to support clients into employment and improve engagement with employers to help fill vacancies and support business growth.

Additional achievements included in 2005/6, 103 new start businesses received grant supports (target 95), 90 young people commenced apprenticeships (target 80), 1264 people supported interim employment (ATfJ target 380), tailored support business support to help businesses to increase their turnover and create employment opportunities to increase the quantity and quality of new start businesses. Completion of Novus Business Centre which offered high quality office space, engaging with wider economic strategies such as the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI), promoting and developing entrepreneurial culture. Members of the Economy Sub Group had been and continued to be particularly active in the treasury support of national Round 1 programme.

R Prisk explained that the group had been least effective in maintaining an up to date evidence base related to the performance of the local economy and dynamics and the local labour market and through this to review, assess and measure the effect specific initiatives were having within East Durham. The Economy Group regularly received updates on individual project performances, targets achieved and financial resources committed. However, there was a need to review performance in a broader outcome and impact sense derived from all activities more effectively to manage risk factors and enable projects to deliver maximum benefits to the communities of East Durham. Data sharing was however now been developed through Employability Task Group.

Partnership engagement and maintenance of the participation of all key economic agencies that operated at the sub regional and regional level.

This fact was tackled through maintaining contact with representatives of such agencies through over partnership working routes as appropriate.

Better processes for developing reserve projects: opportunities often arose to bid for additional funding to meet and help deliver the economy groups priorities. Co-ordinated approaches and reserve projects would enable a group to maximise all opportunities.

Engaging the business community: there was a need to improve linkages between the business forum/East Durham Development Agency and the Economy Group to ensure that the needs of the business community were met effectively. Plans were in progress to enable this to be addressed.

(iii) **Are the LSP Sub Groups equally as effective in terms of structure and outcomes?**

R Prisk explained that as the Chair of the Economy Group he was not able to answer this question as he had had no direct involvement in other sub groups. However, as a member of the LSP Executive into which all sub groups report, he felt that each group had developed operational practices to deliver outcomes that were suitable for the nature of the differing services that they were concerned with and the cultural approaches of the organisations involved.

(iv) **How does the LSP ensure that full benefits of sharing data and information between partners was obtained?**

R Prisk explained that all sub groups produced performance reports and presentations to the LSP. Each sub group had agreed targets and priorities which were shared with all partners to ensure common goals were achieved and maximised. Regular updates were provided at sub group meetings to ensure partners were aware of all activities and progress. Flexible agendas at the sub groups facilitated partner engagement and information sharing.

(v) **What steps could the LSP take to ensure wider involvement in its work?**

R Prisk explained that for the Economy Group's work, a key stakeholder comprised local businesses as representing the labour demand side of the economy and local communities in terms of labour supply side issues related to skills and attainment. A variety of means to communicate and engage with differing groups or interest were used to ensure the shape and nature of services provided was aligned to meet business objectives and local communities aspirations. Maintenance of involvement was however dependent on maintaining a regular dialogue and delivering on commitments to build up trust and appreciation of the scope and remit of the LSP's activities.

To achieve the goal of greater involvement, a number of techniques were used and could be built upon including wider stakeholders awareness raising events, events to celebrate progress/achievements, communication strategies and mechanisms and a range of networking and personal contact approaches to build up a more informed picture of issues and expectations regarding an effective economic development service.

The LSP could also work to develop and cement links between sub groups to ensure collaborative working and common priorities that would help to ensure wider involvement. In addition, there was a need to further develop the LSP website to facilitate information sharing and was also a good mechanism to engage with the public. Connections should be made with other agencies and partner websites to illustrate connectivity.

(vi) **The LSP should be accountable to the community for its work. How was accountability achieved, measured and reported back to the community? Was the membership of the LSP and its sub groups reflective of the community?**

R Prisk explained that all LSP economic priorities were aligned with the Community Strategy and therefore thought to broadly reflect community needs.

The Community Empowerment Network attended sub group meetings, the Executive and the Strategic Funding Group and represented the community perspective. At least three CEN members were invited to each of the sub groups and all cascaded information back to the community. However, it was recognised that this good level of representation presently achieved did not represent all aspects of the community. It was important to provide communication and all involvement routes were used. This was particularly important for the Economy Group given a critical community to engage with is the business community and also regional and sub regional

agencies with responsibility for specific aspects of the economic policy agenda, such as, One NorthEast, County Durham Learning and Skills Council and Business Link County Durham.

It should also be noted that in a number of aspects the LSP was charged to assist to deliver national policy goals such as for example reducing levels of worklessness. In these instances, there was a need to address concerns that might not be immediately recognised as local community priorities but represent a wider responsibility of the LSP.

(vii) **How effective was the LSP at communicating its achievements/non-achievements and those of the sub group?**

R Prisk explained that the LSP was fairly effective at communicating achievements and non-achievements and used a variety of mechanisms including:

- East Durham Business Service newsletter;
- LSP TV;
- press releases;
- promotional and publicity campaigns;
- websites (however this required development to ensure it was effective);
- newsletters and newspapers including Infopoint.

There was a need for continuing effective communications mechanisms. Better use could be made of the LSP Communications Group to ensure there was a co-ordinated and a partnership approach towards communication. Additionally some reports should be distributed to all sub groups to ensure full awareness of key issues.

(viii) **What arrangements were in place within the Sub Group to report upon its activities and what were the reporting mechanisms within the Sub Group to the LSP?**

R Prisk explained that there was a variety of arrangements within the sub group to report upon activities including:-

- Employability Task Group reports to the Economy Group;
- quarterly performance reports in relation to spend targets and progress of activities;
- wider economy strategies and initiatives were updated within meetings both verbally and through written reports;
- presentations on key issues.
- all group members were encouraged to participate and update on activities.

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Reporting mechanism to the LSP included the Chairs reports to the LSP Executive, specific activity presentations, quarterly performance management report and annual review reports particularly around key targets and worklessness.

(ix) **How effective was the LSP and the Sub Groups at raising awareness of its activities to partner organisations and the community?**

R Prisk explained that as highlighted previously, raising awareness was fairly effective and was done through a variety of mechanisms. However, there was a need to develop the role of the Communications Group to ensure these methods were effective and being maximised.

R Prisk explained that there was a partnership approach to meet priorities with a strategic focus on key issues facing East Durham and processes were in place to promote this approach. Overall, the group needed to increase economic prosperity of East Durham and was trying to promote an enterprise culture. A co-ordinated approach needed to be facilitated to tackle the labour supply, supporting the business base and maximising assets.

The Chair referred to employability and explained that a previous presentation had been given to the committee from the Chair of the Learning and Skills Sub Group and queried at what point did education and employment issues connect. R Prisk explained that this was often discussed at the LSP Executive. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund made sure things were joined up as best they could. There was a commitment to Local Area Agreements which included an issue of driving up attainment and skills levels. 50% of people had no formal qualifications in the district and it was a large gap to close. The Learning and Skills Group was being reformed to the Childrens Services Group to marry with the recent changes at Durham County Council. Post 16 Education would be transferring to the Economy Group. Joint meetings were held from time to time with both groups.

A Member referred to a dip in educational attainment at Key Stage 3, and suggested that some people be given the opportunity to find work at the age of 14 rather than 16.

R Prisk explained that there was a reduction in performance at Key Stage 3 and 4, particularly in boys. They needed to be motivated and continue in a positive learning progression. More vocational GCSEs and partnerships with colleges were required. If East Durham's economy was to grow and remain competitive it would need to have available a more skilled workforce.