

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE REGENERATION SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON MONDAY 4 JUNE 2007

Present: Councillor Mrs E M Connor (Chair)
Councillors S Bishop, Mrs S Forster,
H High, M Routledge, Mrs B A Sloan
and C Walker

Apologies: Councillors A J Holmes, D Raine
and D J Taylor-Gooby

- 1 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 25 May 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

- 2 **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

- 3 **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Scrutiny Support Manager reported that as part of the review of Scrutiny Structures the Chair would provide feedback from the Scrutiny Management Board on issues which fell within the remit of this Committee.

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 1 June 2007 the following issues, which fell within the remit of this Committee, were discussed: -

- (i) Staffing Arrangements within the Regeneration and Partnerships Unit
- (ii) Proposed Re-structure – Asset and Property Management Unit

Members were advised that both reports were agreed.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

- 4 **FORWARD PLAN**

Consideration was given to the current Forward Plan of key decisions which covered the period 1 June to 30 September 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Scrutiny Support Manager advised that the Forward Plan set out key decisions which were to be considered by the Executive. The purpose of circulating the Forward Plan was to provide the Scrutiny Committee's an opportunity to examine and influence issues that were to be considered by Executive and become involved in the decision making process.

There were no issues within the current Forward Plan which related to regeneration, housing or health and came under the remit of this committee.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5 SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – EAST DURHAM BUSINESS SERVICE

Consideration was given to the report of the Manager of East Durham Business Service (EDBS) which gave details of performance of East Durham Business Service, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that EDBS was established in July 2003 as a joint working arrangement between the Council's economic development function and East Durham Development Agency. EDBS provided a single point of contact for support and advice to businesses in Easington District.

Appendix 1 to the report outlined the performance from 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007 and Appendix 2 detailed the latest structure for the Business Service.

S Slaven provided the following examples of the range of services provided by East Durham Business Service and the work undertaken by staff during 2006/2007.

Members were advised that a key area of work for the Principal Economic Development Officer had been to project manage the development of the Novus Business Centre. The Centre, which was completed in September 2006 and opened its doors to clients in November 2006, provided 31 office units to let.

The Economic Development Officer provided support in the development of capital projects, economic development policy and strategy. A major area of work had been the development of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) which took the lead on two workstreams, Transforming Enterprise Culture and Worklessness and Skills. This had incorporated extensive partnership working, planning, co-ordination and project management.

The Marketing Officer had been responsible for creating the brand and marketing material for Novus Business Centre as well as co-ordinating all marketing activities for the complex, internal and external signage and the ground floor artwork.

The Marketing Officer had also organised the Celebration of Enterprise Event held in November 2006 where all new start up businesses, established by EDBS, were invited to recognise their achievement and the contribution made to the local economy.

A major role for the Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator had been working with the Business Start Up Advisor in offering advice and grant support for local people wishing to start their own business. The Training and Learning Grant was aimed at assisting residents of East Durham to acquire the skills and qualifications required to start and sustain their own business. The grant had been very successful and supported 23 pre start and 10 post start clients, far exceeding the original target of 20.

Another key piece of work was managing a feasibility study into the potential of developing an Engineering and Technology Training Centre in East Durham. The basis of the study was to investigate whether training provision, for high-level engineering and technology training, was inadequate in serving the needs of employers across East Durham and the County as a whole. The final report had identified the need for a local facility, and the recommendations were currently being considered.

The Tourism Officer had organised and co-ordinated a "familiarisation trip" which brought owners and managers of national coach companies to the area to look at

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the possibility of carrying out coach and day trips to the district. This had proved very successful and Dalton Park had managed to secure trips.

The Officer also administered a new grant scheme, the Tourism Development Grant which assisted the District's accommodation providers to secure an advisory visit from Visit Britain (VB) to enable them to take the first step onto the VB grading system. A VB inspector carried out the advisory visits and the accommodation providers were advised of what was needed for their premises to reach the criteria expected to achieve a "star rating."

The main role of the Apprenticeship Recruitment Consultant was to promote apprenticeships as a viable career path for young people and create the linkages with local businesses, schools, the college and training providers so that young people, with the right skills, could be matched to suitable vacancies. The officer was also able to offer wage subsidy grants to companies wanting to take on an apprentice.

Councillor H High explained that he had received a number of complaints from residents in relation to the number of industrial units that were stood empty while the Business Service were provided the Novus Business Centre, a new building. S Slaven advised that there was a shortage of office accommodation not factory units and the factory units that were currently stood empty were not suitable to be converted to office accommodation. In addition, the funding that was allocated for the Novus Business Centre could not be used to convert an existing building. An assurance was given that the vacant units were being looked at with a view to bringing them back into use. This could be achieved by dividing up some of the larger units to make them smaller and more suitable to smaller businesses. It was explained that there had initially been a lot of enquiries in relation to the units available to let at the Novus Business Centre and there was currently 8 units out of the 31 occupied.

Councillor H High referred to the proposed Engineering and Technology Training Centre and asked if this conflicted with courses offered by East Durham and Houghall Community College. S Slaven advised that East Durham and Houghall Community College did offer similar courses but only to a certain level. There was no conflict and it was hoped to compliment the courses already offered by the college. The facility was needed and it was proposed to work with the college not compete against it.

Councillor C Walker was pleased to see the schemes that had progressed in relation to tourism, particularly the familiarisation visits and the VB grading system. He queried if the Parish/Town Councils were advised of this work. S Slaven advised that the Tourism Officer worked closely with the Town/Parish Councils and was currently working with the Area Tourism Partnership which marketed the whole of County Durham.

Councillor R Crute, Executive Member for Regeneration advised that tourism was an integral part of the recently launched Easington Regeneration Statement. He advised that there were a number of good news stories that could be publicised.

Councillor S Bishop queried the wage subsidy that was provided to companies who employed apprentices. S Slaven advised that the subsidy was 50% of the wage paid to the apprentice and lasted for 3 months.

Councillor M Routledge queried the type of apprenticeship being offered and in what areas of work. S Slaven advised that they were Modern Apprenticeships and

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covered a wide range of work areas. Councillor Routledge requested a breakdown of the areas of work apprenticeships were being offered in. S Slaven advised that a breakdown of all apprenticeship trades could be provided to Members.

It was explained that two East Durham Business Service Advisors acted as Account Managers to work as part of the County Durham Business Support Network and provided a range of business advice to existing companies. During the year 263 clients were advised on issues around competitiveness and growth against a figure of 236 in the previous year. 31 companies expanded their business through either taking larger premises or making a significant capital investment and creating jobs. Job pledges from these companies amounted to 1217 compared with 256 in 2005/2006.

Through the NRF funded Growth Grant, EDBS had assisted 15 small companies looking to expand by taking additional premises and investing in productive and office equipment.

There had been a large amount of change and uncertainty as to how start up advice was delivered. However, the Business Start Up Advisor had worked with 273 people looking to set up in business, compared to 303 in 2005/2006. Of the 113 starts benefiting from EDBS grant, 98 were advised to varying degrees.

It was explained that the nature of the Retail Advisor post had changed at the start of the year, as the post became a Business Link Specialist Account Manager with countywide responsibilities. Whilst EDBS targets were scaled back accordingly, 26 retailers in 4 target areas improved their premises. The Retail Advisor had provided advice to 82 clients during the year against a target of 50.

The Marketing Advisor had advised over 150 companies on marketing during the year. The NRF grant funding had supported 45 growth and start up companies to market their businesses.

The Workplace Health Advisor post was funded by the PCT and based at EDBS to enable better access to businesses and local companies through linking with other EDBS advisors and using the EDBS brand. During the past year the Officer had assisted 9 employers with their work related to relevant levels of the Working for Health Award. Specific PCT projects that employers had participated in included the One Step Project, which promoted physical activity in the workplace, and the Men at Work project.

The newly created post of Business Centre Co-ordinator had involved resolving final snagging issues and developing the necessary policies and procedures for the Novus Business Centre with officers from the District Council, as well as handling enquiries and liaising with tenants.

Councillor H High expressed concern at the problems related to traffic congestion at the Brackenhill/Whitehouse Industrial Estate. The situation had been reported to Durham County Council but Councillor High felt that further investment was needed to improve the road infrastructure and asked if any grants were available. S Slaven advised that the Business Service did liaise with local companies to stagger shift patterns and alter start/finish times to try and alleviate the traffic congestion. However, this problem was not unique to the Brackenhill/Whitehouse Industrial Estate. Councillor High felt that no matter how the start/finish times were staggered the problem would not improve unless further investment was made in the infrastructure.

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Councillor R Crute advised that whilst very little could be done about the traffic congestion there were limited measures that could be undertaken to improve the situation. He suggested that the Business Centre liaise with local transport companies to provide more public transport. The possibility of a park and ride scheme could also be investigated. He explained that grants were not available for transport or the improvement or transport infrastructure.

Appendix 3 to the report outlined the performance targets for EDBS for 2007/2008.

The development of the Service Plan and targets for 2007/2008 had been constrained by the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Business Support Team as a result of the creation of Business Link North East. The proposed performance targets took account of these changes and reflected the outputs required to be achieved for NRF funding.

Councillor S Bishop made reference to start up grants for new businesses and queried if a company went into liquidation were they eligible to apply for a similar grant within say a period of 12 months. S Slaven advised that this had never happened in such a short time period but if the business involved had learned valuable lessons and came forward with a suitable business plan then their application would be considered.

The Chair thanked S Slaven for her attendance.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6 **DISTRICT OF EASINGTON SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007**

Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny Support Manager which sought approval of the District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2006/2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report detailed the work of the Council's scrutiny function undertaken by the three Scrutiny Committees during 2006/2007.

The Scrutiny Support Manager advised that in April 2006, the Council reviewed its scrutiny structures and established three new Scrutiny Committees based around Executive Portfolios.

The report highlighted the relevant Service Unit Position Statements that would be considered by the newly established Scrutiny Committees and set out the proposed areas of work that would form part of the new Committees' work programme for 2007/2008. This included slippage from the 2006/2007 work programmes which fell within the remit of this committee and policy and service development issues which had been identified as Council Priorities in the revised Corporate Plan.

The report also detailed the challenges and areas of future development that would be faced by the Scrutiny Committees arising from both the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" and the Police and Justice Act 2006, particularly where they related to the proposals to establish "Community Calls for Action."

Member training, which focussed on the implications of the White Paper, would be facilitated by INLOGOV and tailored to meet the Council's requirements.

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RESOLVED that the District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2006/2007 be approved and submitted to Full Council for endorsement.

7 **ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that the following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

8 **BRACKENHILL/WHITEHOUSE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE (AOB)**

Councillor H High requested that the problems related to traffic congestion at Brackenhill/Whitehouse Industrial Estate be included in the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee's future work programme.

The Scrutiny Support Manager suggested that Durham County Council might hold statistics, which gave details of the amount of people accessing and leaving the Industrial Estate at peak times, and could possibly be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss traffic management at the Brackenhill/Whitehouse Industrial Estate.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Support Manager investigate the possibility of an officer from Durham County Council attending a future meeting of the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee to discuss traffic management at the Brackenhill/Whitehouse Industrial Estate.

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