

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of the **Building a Strong Economy Scrutiny Committee** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 23 June 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Moran in the Chair

Members:

Councillors J Armstrong, J Cordon, D Freeman, B Graham, S Hugill, J Hunter, R Liddle, D Morgan, C Potts, P Stradling, Andrew Turner, A Willis and R Yorke.

Other Members:

Councillors O Brown, R Burnip, C Carr, N Foster, C Parker, Allen Turner, M Williams

Co-opted Members:

Mr B Scott

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Harrison, Jopling, and Yorke.

A1 Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Building a Strong Economy Scrutiny Committee.

A2 Terms of Reference of the Committee

The Committee noted a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding the Terms of Reference of the Committee, Membership for 2008/09, and the Dates of Meetings.

A3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A5 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

A6 Economic Development- Overview of Directorate Priorities

The Committee received a presentation from Bob Ward, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration which gave an Overview of the Directorate Priorities (for copy of slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

His presentation included the County Durham Economic Strategy Consultation, Economic Challenges and Opportunities, World Class Economic Assets, Targets for 2013, Action Plan, The Review of Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, Audit Commission Report 2007, and a Look at the Future.

Ken Jarrold, Independent Chair of The County Durham Economic Partnership provided the Committee with information on the current position of the economy in County Durham, that the issue of skills was top priority, their working relationships with LSC and Jobcentre Plus, of the ideas that are emerging to take forward the economy through close working relationships between schools, colleges and employers, the importance of working with the private sector, and the university, and how tourism was important for the county.

Bob Ward explained that in order to meet the targets for 2013 they would require additional resources from Government.

Councillor N Foster, the Cabinet portfolio holder advised of the importance of developing the skills agenda, and that this was an area to be developed in partnership with local employers, schools and colleges.

In response to a question from Councillor Cordon, Ken Jarrold explained that the work in relation to vocational training is not co-ordinated between schools and colleges. He pointed out that it was difficult to change this overnight however they could ensure that local employers more aware of what could be done within the national curriculum.

Mrs Brown commented that people in County Durham are passionate about getting this right, however it seems that the county is behind other areas on this. They need to convince people to come together and work with Local Authorities to ensure they have the right structures in place.

Councillor Armstrong advised of the need to have the support of local MPs on this issue. He suggested that they invite local MPs to get involved and to receive Nick Brown's comments on RSS.

Councillor Carr enquired was concerned that small business may have to close. Bob Ward advised that the Esh Group had advised of a significant down turn in work , however there are some aspects of the economy that are quite robust. He suggested that economic migrants are now returning home which should free up work for people in this county. He suggested that there will be companies that fall victim to this process.

It was pointed out that the PCTs are providing funding to get people fit and healthy and back to work. There are local employer partnerships so employers are being given a lot of extra help, and that Jobcentre Plus are working hard to co-ordinate what everyone is doing.

In response to Councillor Armstrong enquiring whether there was still competition between Further education colleges, Feisal Jassat explained that thorough undertaking the Neet's Project a report was considered from the colleges on how they were working together.

Ken Jarrold advised that they need to work on the areas were a difference can be made.

A7 Overview of Local Area Agreement (LAA), Sustainable Communities Strategy, the Corporate Plan, and Performance Framework

The Committee received a presentation from Donna Jefferson, Senior Corporate Policy & Performance Officer which gave an Overview of the Local Area Agreement, The County Durham Sustainable Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan, and Performance Framework (for copy of slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

Councillor Stradling suggested that the Committee scrutinise the Partnerships that have been formed in relation to how they are working together and their effectiveness.

Councillor Cordon suggested that there could be a separate central centre that provides vocational training for skills, and they could look at why there is a skills gap.

It was suggested that a future meeting of the Committee be held at NetPark to provide Members with the opportunity to look at the facility.

It was suggested that the Committee look at tourism as it is a major part of economic development.

The Committee would undertake systematic reviews of the projects undertaken by the former Sub-Committee. Previous reports of projects would be available for Members.

The Committee determined that Members would consider the reports of previous projects undertaken by the former Building a Strong Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee and the Action Plan from The County Durham Economic Partnership. Its work programme would look at the skills gap, and tourism.