

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**At a Meeting** of the **Building a Strong Economy Scrutiny Committee** held at NetPark, Sedgfield on **Monday 8 September 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor J Moran** in the Chair

**Members:**

Councillors B Arthur, C Carr, B Graham, S Hugill, P Jopling, D Morgan, A Naylor, P Stradling, E Tomlinson, Andrew Turner, R Yorke.

**Other Member:**

Councillor N C Foster

**Co-opted Members:**

M Fish

**A1 Welcome**

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

Stuart Watkins welcomed the Committee Members to NetPark, which was one of the fastest growing science parks in the UK.

**A2 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to Councillor C Carr's apologies for absence being recorded.

**A3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **A4 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

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

#### **A5 County Durham Area Tourism Management Plan (ATMaP) Update**

The Committee received a presentation from Melanie Sensicle, Chief Executive of County Durham Tourism Partnership (for copy of slides and Area Tourism Management Plan (ATMaP) see file of Minutes)

Melanie explained that the ATMaP was a plan which turned the regional tourism strategy and County Durham tourism strategy, as well as the relevant parts of the regional and sub-regional economic development strategies, into action. The ATMaP was a 'live' document, and was revised on a six-monthly basis, in September and March.

Councillor Stradling asked whether the ATMaP included encouraging local people to utilise tourism within the area. Melanie replied that the objective of the ATMaP was to improve the economic impact of tourism to the County and the area, and as such local tourism did not have much effect of this.

Councillor Carr asked whether the ATMaP gave consideration to those visiting the area with mobile homes and caravans. Melanie replied that nothing specific was being done for this sector of tourism. Research had shown that in terms of economic value, the highest value visitor was the conference delegate, next was a visitor staying in serviced accommodation, and the ATMaP focussed on those with the highest economic benefit.

Councillor Yorke asked what the annual budget of the County Durham Tourism Partnership was, and what the sources of funding were. He also asked whether there was a list of all attractions available for Members to look at. Melanie replied that a full list of attractions could be found on [www.VisitCountyDurham.com](http://www.VisitCountyDurham.com). The Partnership had an annual budget of £500,000 and was funded by the Regional Development Agency, Local Authorities, OneNorthEast and the private sector.

In reply to a question regarding the lack of road signage for attractions, Melanie informed the Committee that the County Council had recently agreed to revise its' tourism signage policy to take into account more recent developments, for example, the use of white on brown road signs.

The Chairman thanked Melanie on behalf of the Committee for her interesting and informative presentation.

#### **A6 Green Paper Consultation 'No One Written Off: Reforming Welfare to Reward Responsibility'**

The Committee considered an Executive Summary of the Government Green Paper 'No One Written Off: Reforming Welfare to Reward Responsibility' and received a presentation from Jon Clapham of Jobcentre Plus on the Green Paper (for copy of Executive Summary and slides of the presentation see file of Minutes)

The Green Paper aimed to produce the following:

- To simplify the benefits system with only two working age benefits – Job Seekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance
- Provide personalised support for everyone who needs it to get into and remain in work – out of work benefits are a temporary measure and there was no right to a life on benefits
- Unemployed people undertaking work for their benefits if they remain long term unemployed
- A review of the Social Fund and Industrial Injury Disablement Benefit (IIDB)
- A full disregard for child maintenance
- A substantial increase in Access to Work funding to support disabled people to go into and stay in work
- Appropriate incentives for employers via Local Employment Partnerships
- A tougher sanctions regime
- Improved financial support and greater control over support for the most severely disabled people
- Devolving power to Jobcentre Plus advisers, local communities and providers to provide more personalised support to customers
- Extra support for people with drug dependency combined with greater requirements on them to accept treatment

Jon informed the Committee that the consultation period on the Green Paper ended on 22 October 2008, and responses could be sent via email or writing to the Department for Work and Pensions Green Paper Consultation Team.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Committee that the County Council's response to the Green Paper was to be considered by Cabinet on 9 October 2008. Prior to the Cabinet meeting, Members of the Committee would be given the opportunity to provide comments on the County Council's proposed response.

## **A7 County Durham Economic Strategy**

### **(i) Action Plan/Update**

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Environment Services which provided a progress update on the County Durham Economic Strategy (CDES) 2008-2013 along with a forward plan for the implementation of the CDES, Action Plan and Economic Assessment (for copy see file of Minutes)

**(ii) Transforming Places; Changing Lives, a framework for regeneration**

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Environment Services regarding the new Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation document entitled 'Transforming Places';

The 'Transforming Places' document set out a package of ambitious proposals which were linked to a number of other recent Government proposals emerging from the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, and consulted on a regeneration framework which outlined how existing organisations and information could be used more effectively to tackle deprivation.