

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
Coordinating panel**

27th March 2007

OS REVIEWS 2004/05 AND 2005/06

TOURISM IN COUNTY DURHAM - 'WISH YOU WERE HERE'

This investigation provided a deeper understanding of the key issues about the development of tourism in County Durham. The report was timely in that the Area Tourism Partnership was in its formative stages and there was an opportunity to influence the way in which the partnership developed.

One of the County Council's key priorities for improvement in the 2005/6 Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan to assist in building a strong economy in County Durham was to help build the tourism sector and, in particular, the value of the tourism sector in the County.

NOTE: A systematic review of progress in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny working group recommendations highlighting what action has been taken is attached.

Proposal for one-off funding: - To support a feasibility study looking at promoting the growth of Business Tourism in the area by providing world class Conference facilities. Indicative Amount £50K

ACCESS TO THE COAST

The Durham Coast is a wonderful asset to our County. There is tremendous scope for improving access to our coast, both for visitors and local people; to support the Strategic Vision for County Durham, promote tourism on the coast and develop the strong economy that will be Dynamic Durham. Our recommendations sought to improve access both for specific groups and generally, but in considering all the recommendations, it needed to be borne in mind that what we and our partners did was undertaken in a careful and measured way to ensure that we improved the quality of life in the County, but did not have a negative impact on environment, communities or economies elsewhere.

The purpose of this scrutiny investigation was to consider the issues and to talk to those who use the coast, or have interests in it, so that opportunities for greater access could be developed.

NOTE: A systematic review of progress in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny working group recommendations highlighting what action has been taken is attached.

Proposal for one-off funding:- To support the construction of a car park at Lime Kiln Gill. Previous estimates produced over the past two years suggest that a contribution in the order of £60,000 would be sufficient along with current allocations to deliver the car park. It should be borne in mind that this improvement will be subject to planning approval.

ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

The County Council has key statutory duties in relation to the maintenance and way marking of rights of way in County Durham and also in keeping the Definitive Map of Rights of Way up-to-date and under continuous review. The changes brought about by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 have substantially increased the area of land in the County to which the public have access for air and recreation. This was likely to bring with it new duties and responsibilities which the Council needed to address.

The work of the Council in relation to access and rights of way has grown steadily over the years. In the past, the County Council had a Strategy for access and rights of way. Work was also guided by the Milestones Initiative, which was funded by the Countryside Commission and included issues such as promotion. In recent years there has been no specific Strategy, the Council's approach in relation to access and rights of way being guided by the Council's Priorities for Improvement and Service Business and Operational Plans. The 2000 Act will require a Rights of Way Improvement Plan to be developed by the end of 2007.

NOTE: A systematic review of progress in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny working group recommendations highlighting what action has been taken is attached.

Proposal for one off funding: -

- a. To support design, production and printing costs of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

It is estimated that £10K would cover this.

- b. To help fund the Parish Paths Partnership to enable them to respond to a much wider range of projects to be undertaken by Parish and Town Councils and community groups across the County, offering excellent value for money and strengthening the relationship with this tier of local government, in accordance with the Council's submission on the Local Government White Paper.

Secondly, to support a set of practical guidelines to the Parish Paths Partnership in offering practical advice to Parish and Town Councils and community groups on achieving value for money and cost-effective maintenance of paths, including finding other sources of funding.

It is estimated that £40K would help deliver on both items in B).

- c. To support the maintenance of rights of way budget in 2007/08 and so protect maintenance and way-marking of rights of way.

It is estimated that £50K would significantly ameliorate the proposed 30% reduction in this budget in 2007/08

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Working Group found that provision for supporting the educational attainment of Looked After Children in County Durham was generally good, with staff and carers who are dedicated and committed to what they do. The provision of an in-house Access Service has assisted greatly, although key workers have heavy caseloads and there are still issues about support for Looked After Children below Year 5 and the completion of Personal Education Plans which need to be addressed.

All the agencies the group spoke with appeared to work well together and the move towards integrated Children's and Young People's Services should further assist in this regard. Whilst the Working Group felt that the drive to help Looked After Children achieve academically needed to be sustained, it recognises that, for some young people, it is as important, if not more important, that their emotional and behavioural needs are addressed first to enable them on leaving care to go on to play their full part as members of society. For some young people there may need to be an alternative pathway with greater assistance for vocational studies and skills which will allow them when leaving care to be able to support themselves.

As a major employer locally, the Council may itself wish to consider how it can provide assistance in this area.

NOTE: A systematic review of progress in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny working group recommendations highlighting what action has been taken is attached.

Proposal for one off funding: - Members are asked to note that the proposals for one off funding in the Key Stage 4 recommendations include support for Looked After Children

OPPORTUNITY AGE

This project was suggested because of the importance of increasing choice and diversity in services for older people in County Durham. This is one of the Council's medium term priorities for improvement. However, in County Durham, it is perhaps even more relevant because of the expected changes in demographics. This investigation considered the implications of this significant change both for the Council but, more specifically, how this investigation can assist in improving the well being of residents of County Durham.

It was recognised that the culture of lifelong learning was not something, which was likely to be fulfilled by considering this issue when people were admitted to residential care. The approach to lifelong learning was very much a cradle-to-

grave issue. Indeed, the earlier this mindset was established, the better opportunity there would be to provide a longer and healthier and active life. Accordingly, it was agreed that the project would consider those people aged 50 and over.

NOTE: A systematic review of progress in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny working group recommendations highlighting what action has been taken is attached.

No Proposal

Feisal Jassat
March 2007.