

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP- SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

At a Meeting of The Overview And Scrutiny Working Group to look at the Sustainable Community Strategy was held at County Hall, Durham on Wednesday 3 September 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Councillor P Stradling in the Chair

Members:

Councillors A Bainbridge, B Bainbridge, M Campbell, M Dixon, B Graham, E Mavin, A Naylor, E Paylor, A Shiell, M Wilkes, and M Williams.

Co-opted Members:

Mrs O Brown, Mr K Ibbotson, and Mrs A Tallentire

Apologies for absence were received from J Armstrong, J Gray, S Iveson, P Jopling, and Mr M Jones.

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Sustainable Community Strategy- Consultation

The Working Group considered a report and received a presentation from the Head of Policy and Improvement regarding the consultation document on the Sustainable Community Strategy (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of Notes)

The Working Group considered the consultation document in detail and made the following recommendations. The Head of Policy and Improvement advised that these comments would be put forward to the Cabinet for their consideration.

The following comments were made:

Our Principles

- With respect to the principle on “gap narrowing” members note that they will always be winners and losers and that what we should try to achieve is to reduce the gap but also ensure we can “level up” thereby avoiding winners and losers in the process.
- A comment on review process was also made. The SCS just like the LAA should have a review period so that assessment can be made on progress and priorities can be changed accordingly.

Economic Wellbeing

- In the current economic climate would it not be better to invest in bigger businesses to grow rather than encouraging small businesses. Although not wanting to stifle the entrepreneur.
- Review of Employment land availability – this should be a joined up approach with each part of the county working on a united front to ensure that there is a record of land available to support economic development/economic growth. This then presents an informed approach to investing across the county in an equitable way.
- Focus on attracting overseas investors with an environmentally and sustainable development track record. Businesses may only invest in those that have a sustainable strategy.
- In order to reduce poverty and provide for better quality of life that people live as close to work as possible. There must have sustainable jobs in every area of the county. That said accessibility planning is very important so that people are able to access jobs and travel accordingly.
- Develop attractive and successful towns – there were many more towns that should be developed therefore the document read that those listed should not be the only areas that should be focussed on. We should focus on for example south or east growth points.
- Seek to provide more services at a local level.
- Collaborating with private sector developers to make cities more attractive.

Achieve Goals

- Engage and work closely with employers- there is a shortage of workforce with critical skills, and there needs to be more interaction with those companies in order to help guide people in the right direction of training and education and work.

- Need to make sure that the best information, advice and guidance is given to young people to help them make choices about careers/jobs etc.....
- Schools to develop better links with higher educational establishments so there is more choice available for young people.

Physical Place

- To add in to the Strategy that to reduce levels of fly tipping as well as fly posting.
- Need more clarity/definition on affordable homes, should this include type of ownership, should it read as 'affordable to all sections of the community'
- Look at the Government announcement yesterday (2/9/08) in relation to strategic housing, as there will be implications for local authorities on sustainable housing.
- To have cheaper housing that will run on renewable energy.
- We need to acknowledge competing priorities – potentially investing in open cast mining, for example, that promotes employment opportunities may have a converse effect on the environment and surrounding areas. Sustainability appraisal is a useful tool to assist with this planning /prioritisation process.

Health

- Reduce health inequalities needs to be included in what we need to achieve.
- Targeted support /interventions for vulnerable people and people with disabilities.
- The relationship with the NHS and PCT is important in a partnership context. The NHS, with us, listens to communities and facilitates meaningful consultation.
- Prioritise action to address alcohol and drug misuse – reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs misuse is what we need to achieve.

Enjoy

- 2012 Olympics needs to be a feature of our SCS. We need to be involved as a significant player.

Positive contributions

- In the promoting and supporting of volunteering to encourage people of all ages to take part.

The Head of Policy and Improvement advised that a copy of the draft response to the consultation document would be sent to Members of the Working Group.