

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
REVIEW

STATE OF THE BOROUGH
(PROSPEROUS BOROUGH)

Report of the Review Group

Members of the Review Group

Councillor V. Chapman (Chairman)

Councillor D. Farry

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rationale

Following an extensive community appraisal and consultation a Community Strategy for Sedgefield Borough was published by the Local Strategic Partnership in 2004. The Strategy identifies the key economic, social and environmental issues facing the Borough and sets out a vision for the Borough in 2014 as a 'Healthy, Prosperous and Attractive Borough with Strong Communities'.

It is structured around these four aims, setting out a number of supporting priorities and targets to be addressed under which specific service improvements will be developed.

Four years after the first publication of the Community Strategy, Overview and Scrutiny Committees decided to undertake a review to look at quality of life issues within the Community Strategy. This is particularly useful in the final year of the Authority as these issues can be benchmarked for future reference. The review also provided Members with the opportunity to make recommendations, where appropriate, to the new Authority.

The review was broken down into sections covering the four key ambitions. Overview and Scrutiny Committees established review groups to look at key ambitions relevant to their responsibilities.

The reviews looked at achievements, gaps/deficiencies in provision and areas in need of improvement.

Each review group produced a report setting out its finding and recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

The reports will be combined to form a 'State of the Borough' report which will be a useful source of reference for the new Council and will provide a benchmark for future assessment.

Membership of the Prosperous Borough Review Group

Councillor V. Chapman (Chairman) and
Councillors D. Farry, G.C. Gray, A. Smith and A. Warburton

Objectives

- To look at both Council and 'other agency' services.
- To highlight areas working well and areas for improvement.
- To make recommendations via Cabinet to the new Council.

Contribution to Council's Ambitions and Community Outcomes

'A borough where high quality businesses can prosper and where local people have the confidence and skills to access the jobs that the offer'.

Process/Methodology

The Review Group gathered information and evidence as follows:

1. The Review Group has met on several occasions between June and November.
2. Attendance by the following to provide information, give presentations and respond to questions from the Review Group:
 - Andy Palmer, Assistant Chief Executive
 - Graham Wood, Corporate Policy and Regeneration Manager
 - Andrew Megginson, Capital Programme Manager – Strategy & Regeneration
 - Shaun Meek, Training Services Manger
 - Ginny Williams, Economic Inclusion Officer, Durham County Council
 - Nick Brewster, Director of Curriculum, Bishop Auckland College
3. Analysis of data, including:
 - Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy – Overarching Framework 2007 – 2010
 - Sedgefield Borough Transitional Plan June 2008 – April 2009
 - Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy 2004 – 2014
 - 'Enterprising People' Sedgefield Economic Development Strategy 2007 – 2011
 - Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committee Performance Update Report 2007/08 Outturns
 - The consultation paper on the proposals to improve 'Planning Policy Statement 6 – Planning for Town Centres'
 - Retail Centres Framework, Shildon
 - Retail Centres Framework, Ferryhill
 - Spennymoor Area Action Plan Public Participation (Issues and Options)

Conclusions & Recommendations

Employment and Economic Activity

Conclusion

The Council has clear strategic direction and strong support from other partner agencies to maximise the potential for growth within the Sedgefield economy. Its Economic Development Section raises the awareness of the Borough's competitive advantages – high quality industrial sites, good transport links and proximity to Durham City, and provides support for people starting up in business through the LEGI Scheme. The Section also works closely with schools to promote school based enterprise and support business engagement through 'Your Business Forum' and has access to Working Neighbourhood Funding to implement initiatives to meet the worklessness targets contained within the County-wide Local Area Agreement.

Recommendation

That work continues with partners/stakeholders to:

- promote the Borough's industrial sites,
- improve the quality of business accommodation available,
- address employability issues, and
- promote entrepreneurship and school based enterprise

to ensure that local residents benefit from increased levels of prosperity.

Regeneration of Town Centres

Conclusion

The Council, through the various studies and plans that have been commissioned, is aware of the problems currently facing the town centres as a result of changing shopping patterns and other economic factors. The work already completed shows that the Council is actively engaging with stakeholders, including local residents, and is working to secure a prosperous future for the towns.

Recommendations

1. That engagement continues with key stakeholders to support the recommendations made within the studies.
2. That the work to improve the vitality and viability of the town centres be supported and continued by the unitary authority.

Improvement of Community Assets - Local Improvement Programme

Conclusion

The Local Improvement Programme is unique to Sedgefield Borough Council, although other local authorities such as Durham City and Derwentside District Councils have variations of community grant programmes. The Programme has resulted in a significant investment in community facilities and open space/recreational provision in the Borough and has provided leverage £2.89 m additional match funding.

The Programme has also strengthened the role of the Council's Area Forums as the Forums provide a local sounding board for proposals, ensuring that local community groups/residents and stakeholders have a say on the priority of the project in their area.

The Programme's application process was considered simple and the Council's officers provide support to applicants at all stages of project development/delivery. The Programme may provide a model for the allocation of funding attached to the proposed Area Action Partnerships.

Recommendations

1. That the new unitary authority considers the operation of the Local Improvement Programme as it may provide a model for the allocation of funding to the proposed Area Action Partnership.
2. That an independent evaluation of the Local Improvement Programme be undertaken to establish its impact against the original criteria set and produce a lessons learnt report.

Learning and Skills

Conclusion

Educational attainment at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 across the Borough and the learning opportunities available from community venues have increased considerably over recent years following the commissioning of services/interventions with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.

With Neighbourhood Renewal Funding having come to an end in March 2008, a number of the initiatives in schools will continue through mainstream or Single Programme funding and work is taking place with partners to develop a commissioning process for Working Neighbourhoods Fund to address the needs of the most disadvantaged residents in relation to education/skills training.

The merger of the Council's Training and Employment Service with Bishop Auckland College will improve the choice, quality and access to training and learning opportunities. It will also offer potential for strategic contracts with major building programmes such as Building Schools for the Future to supply the skills needed.

Recommendation

That the new authority takes on board the lessons learnt by Sedgefield Borough Council which are:

- Key Stage 2 and 4 results must continue to be analysed at a local rather than county level in order resources/initiatives can be targeted on low performing schools.
- Local/community interventions and the one to one person centred approaches to learning have been found to work well and should continue.
- Investment in apprenticeships must continue to ensure that local people have the skills that employers require and that links to public sector employment and major commissions for example Building Schools for the Future be fully exploited.

WHAT MAKES A PROSPEROUS BOROUGH?

This section of the report sets out the progress made by the Council and its partners towards achieving the ambition of a Prosperous Borough.

The definition of a Prosperous Borough is 'a borough where high quality businesses can prosper and where local people have the confidence and skills to access the jobs that they offer'.

The Corporate Plan 2007-2010 and the Transition Plan June 2008 – April 2009 set out the following key objectives in relation to the above ambition:

- Improve the employability of local people
- Enhance the vitality of town centres
- Work with partners to narrow the gap in quality of life experienced by the most disadvantaged

The Sedgefield Borough Local Strategic Partnership has also identified the following as its key priorities:

- improving employment and economic activity rates
- increasing average household income
- improving the educational attainment levels and reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training.

The following areas which influence the prosperity of the Borough's residents have been examined in detail by the Review Group:

- Employment and Economic Activity
- Social Regeneration (Town Centres and the Local Improvement Programme)
- Learning and Skills

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

KEY STATISTICS

- **60.9% of the Borough's population of working age in 2006, compared to national average of 62.2% .**
- **Employment rate in 2006/07 was 69.5%, compared to 74.5% nationally.**
- **Unemployment rate in 2006/07 was 2.6%, compared to 3.1% for the North East.**
- **Job density (jobs per resident of working age males -16 – 64 years old and females 19 – 59 years old) for Sedgefield Borough 0.59 in 2005, compared to 0.84 nationally.**
- **26.9% of working age population economically inactive in 2006/07 compared to the national average of 21.4%.**
- **Self employment rate in 2006/07 was 4.5% significantly lower than the national average of 9.5%.**
- **19.5 VAT Registrations per 10,000 adult population in the Borough in 2006, compared to 32.4 nationally.**
- **Incapacity benefit claimants rate 11.01% in May 2007 compared with the national 6.19% average.**
- **Income support claimants rate 7.75% in 2007, compared to the national rate of 5.68% and county rate of 6.5%**
- **Free school meals rate in the Borough at January 2008 was 19.9% compared to County Durham average of 17.08%**

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH

Sedgefield Borough is not an independent economic unit; its performance is heavily influenced by regional prosperity. Trends affecting the national and regional economies have a significant determining effect at local level. How effectively the Council responds to these trends, can only influence the prosperity of the Borough.

One of the key industrial sectors within Sedgefield is manufacturing. However, traditional manufacturing as an industry is in decline nationally. Since 1995, 13,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in County Durham. Public Administration, Education and Health are now the most predominant employment sectors in the Borough. There has also been dramatic growth in 'services' and distribution, warehousing and hotels'.

The reliance upon a number of manufacturing employers in the Borough leaves many people vulnerable to decisions that could taken at head offices or by parent companies located outside the area. Although the average size of companies within the Borough is reducing, there are still around 9% of companies that employ over 20 people, compared to only 5% nationally. This reflects the branch plant nature of the Borough's economy.

Economic participation levels are also constrained by 'employability issues'- 'worklessness'. The rate of people claiming Incapacity Benefit is much higher than the national average and it is crucial to tackle this reliance on benefits to enable local people to benefit from the economic growth achieved over the past 10 years. This issue is compounded by the potentially difficult economic conditions caused through difficulties in the global finance industry.

The level of migration into the Borough from overseas is slowly rising, with 260 new National Insurance registrations in 2006/07, the majority of which have come from Poland. When local authorities bordering Sedgefield are taken into account, an additional 2,540 people have been added to the potential labour pool in the past year. However, there is some evidence that this trend is reversing.

CURRENT STRATEGY

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Sedgefield Borough Council's Economic Strategy 2007 – 2011' Enterprising People' sets out how the Council will work with partners to support economic activity in the Borough and ensure that local residents benefit from increased levels of prosperity. The focus of the strategy is encouraging and supporting the people of Sedgefield to be more enterprising.

The strategy is divided into three complementary themes – People, Place and Business. The people based element of the strategy aims to maximise the

participation of local people in the labour market and develop the skills of local residents and employees to meet future demand. The place element aims to maximise the Borough's contribution to the regional economy and improve the attractiveness of the Borough as a sustainable business location. The business element seeks to increase the levels of enterprise and improve the sustainability of the existing business base.

The strategy refers to the importance of making the most of the Borough's competitive advantages, which are good transport links – A1(M), A.167 and Bishop Auckland to Darlington rail line, proximity to Durham City and regionally important employment sites at Green Lane, Spennymoor and Aycliffe Business Park and the scientific facilities at NETPark, Sedgefield

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

It is acknowledged that the Council cannot achieve the ambition of a 'Prosperous Borough' by working in isolation. Partnership working is the key to improvement. Sedgefield Borough Local Strategic Partnership brings together the key stakeholders of the Borough and sets the strategic framework via the Community Strategy to co-ordinate activity.

The economic element of the Local Strategic Partnership is co-ordinated through the Prosperous Borough Themed Group, which comprises of over 40 local partners. The activity of the Group is co-ordinated through annual action plans, which focus collaborative resources on the key issues arising from the Sedgefield Economic Development Strategy.

CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

The following services are provided by the Council and its partners to address the economic issues previously mentioned.

Promotion of the Borough as a business location

The Council's Economic Development Team adds value to the efforts of One NorthEast and County Durham Development Company and raises the awareness of businesses, investors and potential residents of the opportunities afforded in the Borough. This ranges from promoting business sites such as Green Lane Industrial Estate, Spennymoor, Aycliffe Business Park and NETPark, highlighting the successes of local companies and encouraging the development of the tourism sector linked to Shildon's £11 million arm of the National Railway Museum – Locomotion.

Green Lane Industrial Estate, Spennymoor offers a high quality business environment close to Durham City.

Aycliffe Business Park is the second largest business park in the North East and has potential to accommodate a significant increase in employment numbers.

NETPARK is perhaps the most high profile asset within Sedgefield Borough. It is one of the fastest growing science, engineering and technology parks in the UK.

It consists of:

- Research Institute which houses research groups from Durham University.
- Incubator Phase 1 which provides space for growing and established small companies and project teams. The facility has attracted spin out businesses from many of the region's universities as well as inward investment from outside the North East and in some cases the UK.
- Incubator Phase 2 is currently being constructed and scheduled for completion at the end of 2008.
- A 3,000 sqm Plastic Electronic Technology Centre is currently under construction at NETPark . It will become a national centre of excellence for the development of plastic electronic technologies.
- An Innovation Village consisting of 5 bespoke R&D NETPods for companies is also being developed.

Provision of business services from Shildon Business Centre.

The Council provides a virtual office service from Shildon Business Centre to support local businesses. This includes:

- A registered business address at the Centre
- Telephone call handling to a unique telephone number, including call forwarding, message taking and appointment making.
- Mail handling
- Office hot desks – desk space is payable on an hourly basis, including telephone access and IT provision
- Incubation offices for a 12 month rental period



Promotion of enterprise and entrepreneurship through the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) Be Enterprising Programme.

The Council is currently part of a £10.2 million 3 year LEGI programme, along with Wear Valley, Derwentside and Easington District Councils to support business and entrepreneurship in deprived communities and reduce levels of worklessness. The main elements of the programme are:

- Enterprise Coaches who provide 'hands on' support to residents who either wish to go into self employment or who would benefit from becoming self employed. Three coaches are employed in Sedgefield Borough. In 2007/2008, 306 people benefited from enterprise coaching on a 1-1 basis, (target was 100), and 107 new start businesses registered in 2007/08 with Inland Revenue as a result of support received through the Enterprise in Deprived Communities Programme (target was 30).
- A Franchising Company to increase involvement in enterprise through franchising. This service is a new innovation which allows people to enter business through franchising, reducing the initial risk to individuals and supporting people into enterprise.
- Financial support in the form of grants up to £3,000 from LEGI and £1,000 from Sedgefield Borough Council to help overcome any financial barriers to enterprise. In 2007/08, 92 businesses benefited from grants awarded through the Enterprise in Deprived Communities programme, (target was 30).
- LEGI funding for capital works to create the space for businesses to develop. There are three areas of opportunity for projects in Sedgefield which are: the conversion of underutilised business accommodation, adaptations to community facilities to provide business space and finally the development of proposals for new build business space.

School based enterprise promotion

The Council employs an Enterprise Facilitator to work with schools in the Borough to promote enterprise in education. The Facilitator has been involved in a number of intensive and innovative projects with pupils at all levels to raise awareness to the possibilities of enterprise as a life choice. This has been achieved by deploying new strategies to engage young entrepreneurs and develop their key skills. Media based projects have engaged disenfranchised young people and allowed them to experiment with new ways of learning, as well as developing a keen business sense in a competitive environment.

The Enterprise Facilitator also works with individuals and groups within the Borough to encourage enterprising behaviours, support business start ups and to provide an ongoing mentoring service. To date over 160 businesses and potential businesses have been supported through this initiative.

Improving the business accommodation available in the Borough and delivering infrastructure projects.

This involves improving the quality, attractiveness and the suitability of existing business accommodation in the Borough and ensuring that the needs of future growth sectors are understood and built into future infrastructure provision.

For example, the Council has employed a consultant to produce an investment plan to establish an overall vision for the Aycliffe Business Park and provide an indication of the actions needed to realise that vision. It is anticipated that the investment part of the plan will identify up to 10 sites located on the Park for development and will support the recent Single Programme funding that has been used on environmental improvements to improve the Park's image.

The development of the potential sites will involve a number of public and private sector partners operating in a joint venture. The public sector organisations will purchase, demolish and remediate the sites marked for development to make them attractive to private sector investment.

The Investment Plan will also assess the broader issues of improving signage and public transport to and from the Park, as well as incorporate recommendations for an energy infrastructure to support both new developments and existing companies.

The improvements have commenced with planning approval being sought for 16m steel structure – 'In Our Image' to become a unique gateway to the southern entrance of Aycliffe Business Park, leading through to the newly developed Heighington Lane West area of the site.

'In Our Image' has received support from the Government's Single Programme, Sedgefield Borough Council's Regeneration Budget and Durham County Council's Urban and Rural Renaissance Initiative. The 'In Our Image' project also provides an opportunity for young people from local schools and colleges to observe the construction process of the sculpture – giving them an insight into the world of engineering.



IN OUR IMAGE

a proposed new sculpture for
Newton Aycliff Business Park

by Joseph Hillier

'My aim is to create a sensational installation of sculpture, which is a beautiful and poignant meditation on the relationship between humanity, technology and matter.'

'The idea of making a sculpture, which seems to be in the process of being built, is in honour of the often undervalued work of those who create the things we use every day'

- Joseph Hillier

Encouraging businesses to engage beyond their immediate environment.

The Council supports business engagement through 'Your Business Forum'. The Forum provides its members with opportunities to share and host joint networking and best practice events. It also supports business clustering through Sedgefield Engineering Forum.

In 2007/08 25 businesses actively participated in Your Business Forum Steering Group, exceeding the target of 20, in addition, 259 businesses attended 'Your Business Forum' workshops which exceeded the target of 75.

Working with companies to minimise the effects of closure

Officers from the Council's Economic Development Section work with companies that have announced their intention to make staff redundant.

For example, following the decision of Electrolux to close its factory in Spennymoor in 2008/2009 and move production to Poland, a Support Group was set up consisting of representatives from the Borough and County Councils, ONE NorthEast, JobCentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council, North East Chamber of Commerce, Engineering Employers Federation and Right Management.

Addressing employability issues

The Council has access to a high level of resources to tackle worklessness and increase skills and enterprise levels. £7.87M of Working Neighbourhood Funding has been allocated for the three year period 2008/09 to 2010/11 by Department of Work and Pensions.

To ensure that this allocation is maximised, the four qualifying local authorities have engaged in discussions around working together to agree a common approach and programme management arrangements and a shared delivery plan to provide economies of scale and demonstrate the overall contribution to County-wide outcomes. This approach will also provide sufficient scope for addressing Sedgefield's specific needs through local project commissioning.

The key commissions of the Sedgefield Borough Working Neighbourhood Fund Programme include:

- Engagement & Support
- Personal Skills Training
- Reducing health barriers to employment
- Employer Engagement
- Implementation in South West Durham of the HANLON Skills Register to help organisations to match disadvantaged jobseekers and their skills to vacancies and training opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The Council has clear strategic direction and strong support from other partner agencies to maximise the potential for growth within the Sedgefield economy. Its Economic Development Section raises the awareness of the Borough's competitive advantages – high quality industrial sites, good transport links and proximity to Durham City, and provides support for people starting up in business through the LEGI Scheme. The Section also works closely with schools to promote school based enterprise and support business engagement through 'Your Business Forum' and has access to Working Neighbourhood Funding to implement initiatives to meet the worklessness targets contained within the County-wide Local Area Agreement.

RECOMMENDATION

That work continues with partners/stakeholders to:

- promote the Borough's industrial sites,
- improve the quality of business accommodation available,
- address employability issues, and
- promote entrepreneurship and school based enterprise

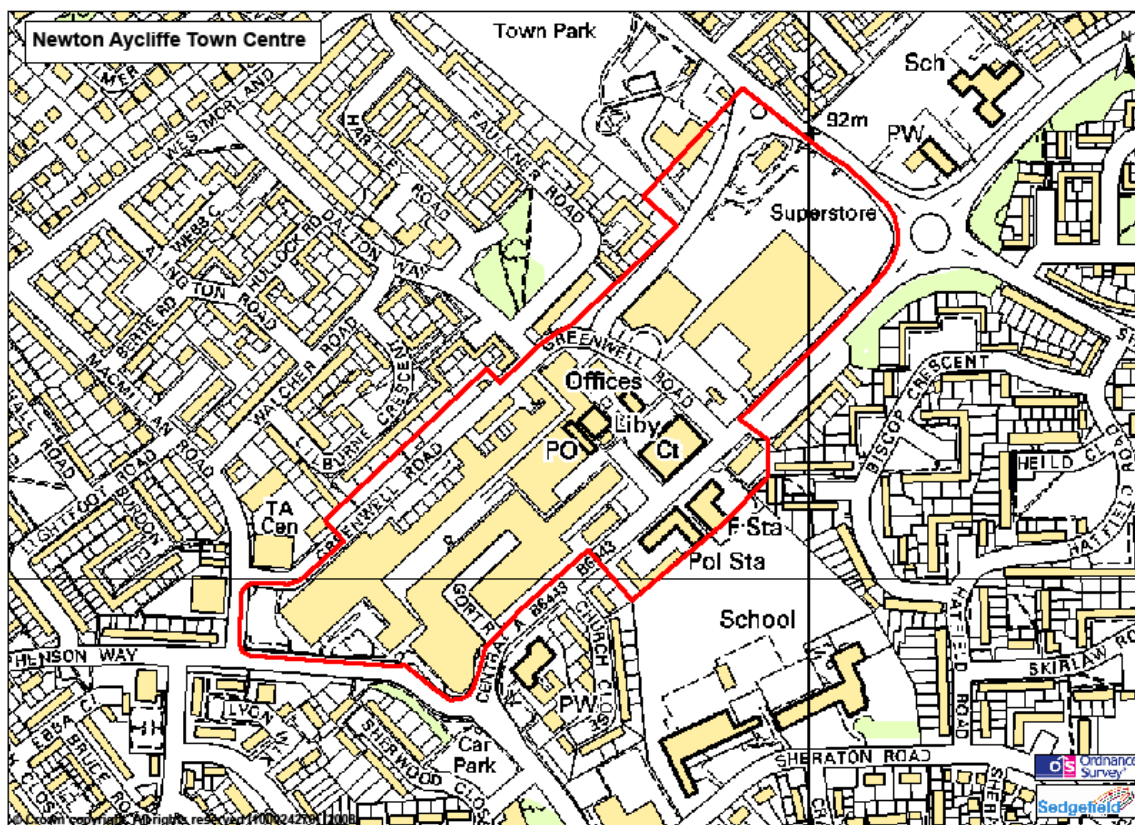
to ensure that local residents benefit from increased levels of prosperity.

With a population of nearly 19,000, Spennymoor is the second largest town in the Borough. Its shopping precinct offers a mix of traditional brick buildings, predominantly along the High Street and a 1970's shopping precinct known as Festival Walk.

As one of the Borough's main towns, Spennymoor has and will benefit from further significant housing growth following planning approvals for sites at Whitworth Park, Watson Court, Thorn Lighting, Merrington Lane and the former Greyhound Stadium. However, the town centre is currently experiencing: falling footfall, reduced customer spend, poor diversity of shops, and low business confidence. There is no significant night time economy. The main complaint of both businesses and customers is the structural condition of Festival Walk and the number of empty units.

Spennymoor has already benefited from over £2 m of capital improvements to the public realm and introduction of art work to improve environmental quality, image and the economic competitiveness of the town centre. The improvement works, which were primarily funded by the Single Programme monies, included: improvements to the gateways and pedestrian links within the town centre, shop front improvement scheme to enhance the appearance of shop frontages and front elevations, traffic calming measures and new pedestrian crossings, together with public art works. The improvements have however not influenced the diversity and quality of the retail offer as this is subject to wider economic forces.

Newton Aycliffe



Newton Aycliffe Town Centre

With a population of over 28,000, Newton Aycliffe is the main retail centre within the Borough and has the largest retail floorspace. The existing centre, which is a multi level arrangement of concrete buildings around a central shopping street, does not provide an environmentally welcoming atmosphere in which to shop or spend much time.

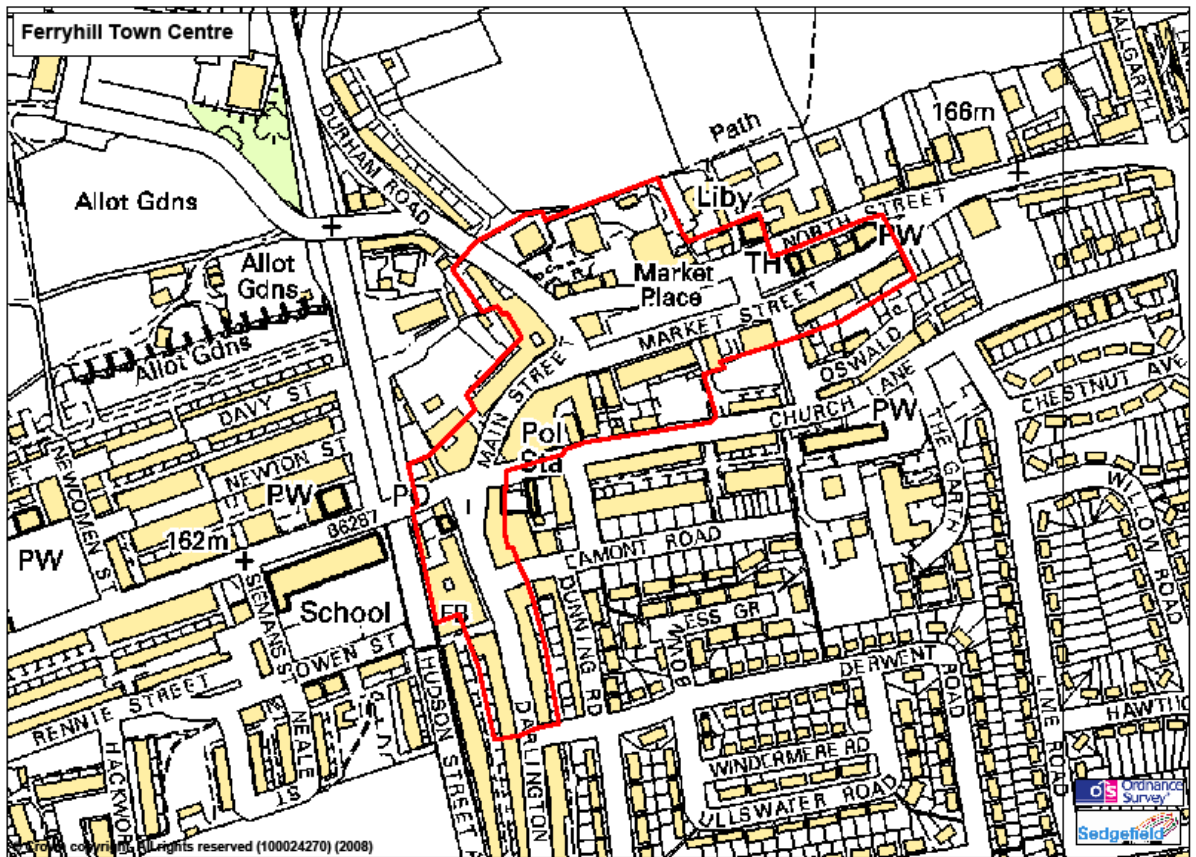
The centre lacks an identity and sense of arrival due to poor entrances and links to the new development. There are no good open spaces or public art. Retailers are discouraged by the lack of suitable space, size and configuration of units and there are concerns regarding the poor integration of public transport.



Newton Aycliffe Town Centre

Ferryhill

Ferryhill has a limited range of shops and services that fall short of meeting the local community's needs. The Council's land use surveys indicate a decline in the quantity of retail floor space over a number of years. The majority of retail provision is located on two main shopping streets, Market Street and Main Street. The food retail offer is relatively limited, with only a small local supermarket (Co-op), which is undermining Ferryhill's position as a District Shopping Centre.

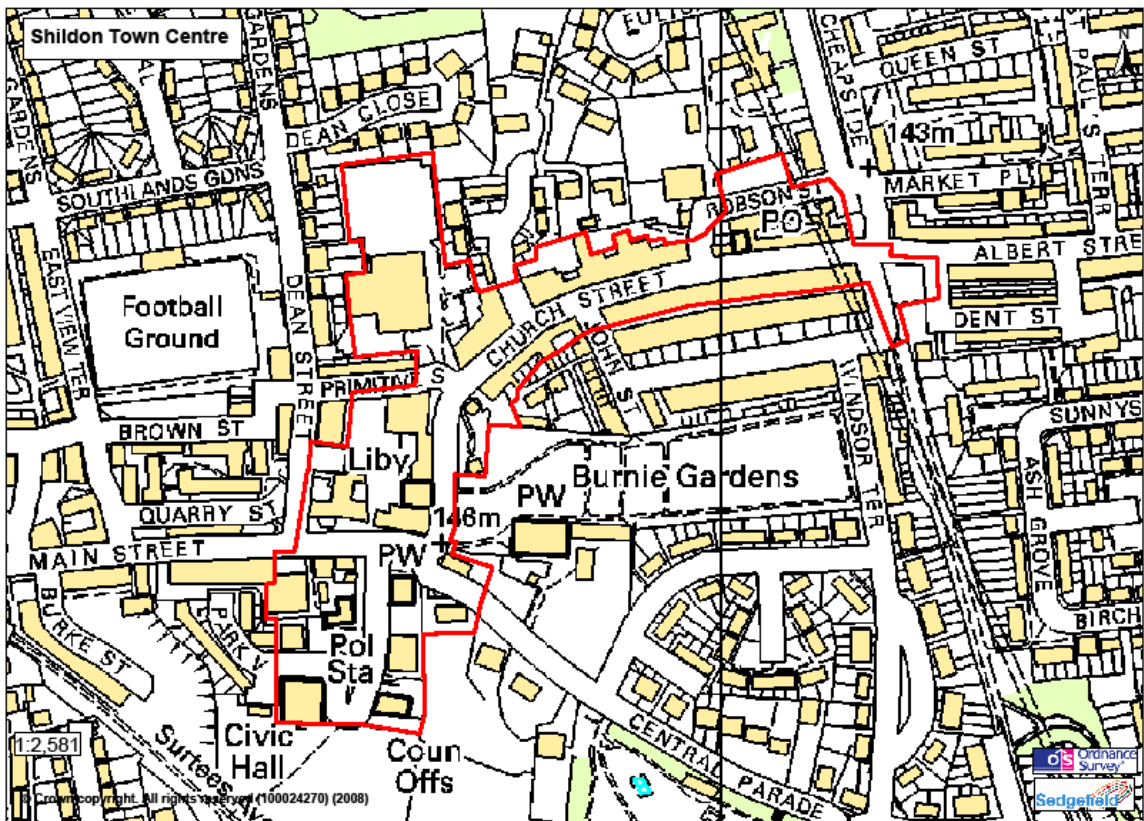


Ferryhill Town Centre

Shildon

Shildon, with a population of over 10,000, has a limited range of shops and services. It has benefited from SRB funding to improve the public realm and shop frontages within the town centre. The main shopping parade is located on Church Street and to a lesser extent on Main Street.





Shildon Town Centre

The County Durham Economic strategy recognises Shildon as one of 12 main towns within the County which should be given priority for the provision of new development, reflecting the opportunities linked Locomotion, the National Railway Museum.

CURRENT STRATEGY

Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy 2004 – 2014 sets out a long term vision for the area, based on the aspirations, needs and priorities of the local community. It identifies the need to address the changing roles of some settlements and main town centres with a comprehensive improvement programme if the Borough is to continue to be an attractive, vibrant and sustainable location for people to live, work and do business.

The Council’s Corporate Plan and Transition Plan also acknowledge that local town and village centres within the Borough have struggled to maintain their competitiveness in the light of changing shopping patterns. The Transition Plan refers to the masterplanning exercises for Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe town centres and opportunities to increase economic activity of other smaller towns.

The Durham New Growth Point Bid, recently approved by the Government, also sets out plans to focus development on six regeneration towns in the County – including Sedgefield Borough – Newton Aycliffe, Shildon and Spennymoor. The initiative would result in significant investment in new housing, employment sites, public transport and public realm improvements.

The benefits from implementing Growth Point status will make Sedgefield Borough a more attractive investment location.

The consultation paper on the proposals to improve 'Planning Policy Statement 6 – Planning for Town Centres', published on 10th July 2008, also reinforces the town centre-first approach to ensure that development continues to take place in town centres and promotes their vitality, viability and character.

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Spennymoor

The Council in recognition that the redevelopment of Spennymoor town centre is a high priority for its residents and businesses, has appointed consultants to produce an Area Action Plan, which would provide a comprehensive regeneration framework.

The objectives of the Plan are to identify:

- key sites with opportunities for development.
- areas that can be reconfigured to maximise investor appeal
- opportunities for increased employment within the town centre
- improvements to vehicle and pedestrian movement in and around the town centre
- improvements to linkages between the town centre and existing/emerging residential developments
- how to enhance and develop the Town's leisure and culture opportunities, including the creation of a stronger evening economy, whilst maximising those that currently exist.

The consultants have produced an Issues and Options report and a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report for the town centre. The documents were issued for initial public consultation in October. Further consultation on the preferred options document will take place in February 2009. It is hoped that the Plan will be adopted by the new unitary authority in 2010 and become part of the Local Development Framework

Newton Aycliffe

The Borough Council is currently working with Durham County Council, NHS County Durham, Great Aycliffe Town Council and Freshwater, the private owner of Newton Aycliffe Town Centre to try and regenerate Newton Aycliffe Town Centre. The aim is to ensure good access to high quality public service outlets and support investment in retail and commercial operations.

The owner, Freshwater has completed and consulted upon a Masterplan for the redevelopment of the town centre.



The proposed layout of Newton Aycliffe town centre by the year 2014

The Town Centre Masterplan has seven phases over 6 years. Its aim is to provide a safer town centre environment and encourage evening activity. The plan sets out to create a 'sense of arrival' to the town centre by creating a main entrance from Stephenson Way.

Linking Beveridge Way to the Tesco development is key to the integration of the two sites. The central ramp within Beveridge Way is to be removed to create a more open environment and greener appearance. The demolition of redundant buildings forms part of the scheme and the library and health provision will be integrated with the Leisure Centre, utilising the arcade.

A new retail store with associated car parking will be erected on the Dalton Way block and there are plans to build a new anchor retail store adjacent to the main entrance. A number of existing shops will be converted to form larger units to meet the demands of modern retailers.

A large public piazza is to be provided adjacent to the public amenity buildings with public art and attractive landscaping throughout the town centre. Existing building facades and canopies will also be refurbished.

Ferryhill

DTZ was commissioned by the Council to undertake a comprehensive study of the centre of Ferryhill to provide a framework for future action and investment.

The study found that the town centre of Ferryhill had, in keeping with other centres of a similar size, been squeezed in recent years as a result of changing shopping patterns and other economic factors.

The consultants' recommendations included:

- Consolidate the retail core – reduce the size of the existing town centre through a gradual consolidation exercise.
- Bring forward a development site for a new anchor food store.
- Implement a comprehensive environmental improvements programme, focusing on improving the functionality of the Market Place and the surrounding streets and pavements.
- Implement a programme of shop front improvement grants aimed at enhancing/revitalising the quality and appearance of the buildings fronting the town centre and providing an investment to boost the local trading environment.

Copies of the consultants' report have been forwarded to Durham County Council, Ferryhill Town Council and local Borough Councillors. It has also been published on the Council's website.

At the time of writing (November 2008) the possibility of funding being made available for improvements under the Urban and Rural Renaissance Initiative was being discussed with officers of Durham County Council.

Shildon

DTZ was commissioned by the Council to undertake a comprehensive study of the centre of Shildon to provide a framework for future action and investment.

The study found that the town centre of Shildon had, in keeping with other centres of a similar size, been squeezed in recent years as a result of changing shopping patterns and other economic factors.

The consultants' recommendations included:

- Redevelopment of opportunity sites to the east and south west of the main shopping high street.
- Parking improvements – parking arrangements are limited with very little on street parking provision, making it difficult to access goods and services quickly and frequently. Pedestrian accessibility within the centre is also hindered in places, through over provision of railings and an excess of street 'clutter' in the form of signage and street furniture.
- Improving the shopping environment – whilst the town centre shopping environment has benefited from some public and private investment in

recent years, in the form of shop frontage improvements and public realm improvements, the success of these schemes has been variable. There is scope to further improve the way the centre looks and functions.

Copies of the consultants' report have been forwarded to Durham County Council, Shildon Town Council and local Borough Councillors. The report has also been sent to businesses, developers and agents to inform them of the sites available for redevelopment and has been published on the Council's website.

CONCLUSION

The Council, through the various studies and plans that have been commissioned, is aware of the problems currently facing the town centres as a result of changing shopping patterns and other economic factors. The work already completed shows that the Council is actively engaging with stakeholders, including local residents, and is working to secure a prosperous future for the towns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That engagement continues with key stakeholders to support the recommendations made within the studies.
2. That the work to improve the vitality and viability of the town centres be supported and continued by the unitary authority.

IMPROVEMENT OF COMMUNITY ASSETS

In addition to the work being undertaken to regenerate the Borough's town centres, the Council is actively involved in improving community assets and supporting community engagement in the regeneration of local areas.

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The sale of land for housing has provided the Council with an opportunity to invest in regeneration across the Borough by creating a Local Improvement Programme. The aim of the Programme is to enhance the usability and access to community buildings and land within the Borough in order to improve activities and services which support the priorities set out in the Council's Community Strategy.

Local communities and partner Town and Parish Councils were able up to 31st July 2008 to submit proposals for support for community led capital projects. Projects eligible for support through the Programme needed to demonstrate:

- Conformity with the Department for Communities and Local Government 'Regeneration' definition
- Clear linkages to the delivery of the Council's Community Strategy and its key aims and planned outcomes.
- A strong local need – backed through local consultation and appraisals
- Measurable benefits – what difference will the project make
- Added value/additional activity
- How any recurrent or revenue funding implications would be managed.
- Maximise additional 'match' funding.

The process for considering projects involves the following:

- Appraisal against the key LIP criteria by officers in the Council's Regeneration Section.
- Discussion at Area Forum meetings. The Area Forum's role being crucial in providing a view as to the priority of the project within the area.
- Consideration of technical issues by Management Team
- Consideration by Cabinet in order to make the final decision on whether to approve funding.

The sum of £3.8m grant funding has been made available, under the Local Improvement Programme, from April 2006 to March 2009. The funding is allocated to Area Forum areas, based on the number of households within the areas. 52 projects have been supported since April 2006 to a value of £3.64 million (October 2008). It is envisaged that £2.89 million of match funding will be obtained from sources such as Northern Rock, Football Foundation and Town/Parish Councils.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

The Programme has resulted in a significant investment in community facilities and open space/recreational provision in the Borough.

Projects funded include a youth drop in centre, a family centre, improvements to Borough's village halls and community centres and the creation of local sports facilities and Multi Use Games Areas.

The Programme has also increased learning/training/skills development as a number of the refurbished community facilities are or will be used as venues for courses. For example – the LIP funding towards the cost of modernising Woodham Village Community Centre will enable the centre to provide a range of new education and skills training courses and more varied casual physical activities. Many of the planned activities will target young and unemployed people. The Community Association has also been successful in obtaining a grant of £6,500 from Durham County Council's Education in the Community to expand the Adult Community Learning Programme for the purchase of ten laptops, a printer and internet connection.



Woodham Community Centre

The refurbished/extended community centres/halls have also provided more revenue for the organisations/community associations in the hire charges as an increased number of people can now use the facilities.

The Programme has also generated income and safeguarded jobs in the construction industry as local companies have been engaged to undertake the work for a number of projects.

CONCLUSION

The Local Improvement Programme is unique to Sedgefield Borough Council, although other local authorities such as Durham City and Derwentside District Councils have variations of community grant programmes.

The Programme has resulted in a significant investment in community facilities and open space/recreational provision in the Borough and has provided leverage - £2.89 m additional match funding.

The Programme has also strengthened the role of the Council's Area Forums as the Forums provide a local sounding board for proposals, ensuring that local community groups/residents and stakeholders have a say on the priority of the project in their area.

The Programme's application process was considered simple and the Council's officers provide support to applicants at all stages of project development/delivery. The Programme may provide a model for the allocation of funding attached to the proposed Area Action Partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the new unitary authority considers the operation of the Local Improvement Programme as a model for the allocation of funding to the proposed Area Action Partnership.
2. That an independent evaluation of the Local Improvement Programme be undertaken to establish its impact against the original criteria set and produce a lessons learnt report.

LEARNING AND SKILLS

KEY STATISTICS

- **90.1% of Year 6 pupils in the Borough's primary schools in 2007 achieved level 4 or above in science at Key Stage 2, 78.9% in English and 80.5% in maths.**
- **72.3% of Year 9 pupils in the Borough's secondary schools in 2007 achieved level 5 or above in science at Key Stage 3, 72.8% in English and 77.7% in maths.**
- **63.4% of Year 11 pupils in the Borough's secondary schools in 2007 obtained at least 5 GCSES at grades A* - C – 1.4% above the national average.**
- **11.6% of 16 – 18 year olds across the Borough in January 2008 were not in education, employment or training.**
- **16.1% of the Borough working age population in 2006 had no qualifications compared to 12.64% nationally.**
- **69.8% of residents in the Borough were qualified up to NVQ Level 1 in 2006 - 2.4% below the national average.**
- **54.3% of residents in the Borough were qualified up to NVQ Level 2 in 2006 – 4.65% below the national average.**

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND SKILLS IN SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment in the Borough's primary and secondary schools has increased over recent years. The Sedgefield Local Strategic Partnership has played a significant role in the improvement by identifying under performing schools and priority groups and commissioning services/interventions in partnership with Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Services to improve attainment levels in the Borough.

The following table shows the improvements.

| Key Stage | 2004 | | | 2007 | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Key Stage 2 % of 11 year olds achieving level 4 or above in: | Sedgefield Borough Average | County Durham Average | National Average | Sedgefield Borough Average | County Durham Average | National Average |
| English | 73.7 | 76.5 | 78 | 78.9 | 80.3 | 80 |
| Maths | 74.6 | 75.6 | 74 | 80.5 | 78.8 | 77 |
| Science | 86.3 | 86.5 | 86 | 90.1 | 88.6 | 88 |

| Key Stage | 2004 | | | 2007 | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Key Stage 3 % of 14 year olds achieving level 5 or above in: | Sedgefield Borough Average | County Durham Average | National Average | Sedgefield Borough Average | County Durham Average | National Average |
| English | 69.5 | 70.6 | 71 | 72.8 | 69.5 | 74 |
| Maths | 68.7 | 70.5 | 73 | 77.7 | 76.2 | 76 |
| Science | 63.3 | 64.6 | 66 | 72.3 | 72.4 | 73 |
| Key Stage 4 % of 16 year olds achieving the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grades A* to C | 46.7 | 46.7 | 53.7 | 63.4 | 60.2 | 62 |

The Sedgefield Borough average figures for Key Stage 3 and 4, do not take account of those pupils who live in the Borough but attend a faith secondary school located outside the Borough.

Adult skills

With regard to the Borough's working age population, the 2006 Annual Population Survey reports that 16.1% have no qualifications compared to 12.64% nationally, 69.9% of residents were qualified up to NVQ Level 1 and above - 2.4% below the national average, 54.3% to NVQ Level 2+ - 4.65% below the national average, 37% to NVQ 3+, compared to 41.2% nationally and 15.4% to NVQ Level 4 - 9.8% below the national average.

In January 2008, 11.6% of 16 – 18 year olds across the Borough were not in education, employment and training (NEET), which is higher than the County Durham average of 10.2% and the national average of 6.8%.

CURRENT STRATEGY

Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy 2004 – 2014 sets out a long term vision for the area, based on the aspirations, needs and priorities of the local community. With regard to skills and learning issues within the Borough, it identifies the need to build on the work that is already taking place in schools, colleges and training centres to raise the educational standards and skills of the Borough residents in line with regional and national averages, to support community learning and to widen participation in learning.

The Council's Transition Plan June 2008 - April 2009 sets out the Council's key priorities for service improvement and the key capital projects to be progressed. With regard to the Council's Training Service, it refers to the delivery of the Train to Gain programme to local businesses to boost the numbers of local people with NVQ Level 2 qualifications and to the development of a new training service in the Borough by merging with Bishop Auckland College, providing £8m capital investment in a learning and employment centre to be based in Spennymoor.

CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Interventions to improve results at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4

As mentioned above, educational attainment in the Borough has increased over recent years supported by the decision of Sedgefield Local Strategic Partnership to commission additional services, using Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, in partnership with the Children and Young People's Services of Durham County Council to combat low achievement and aspiration in the Borough's lowest performing schools.

With regard to Key Stage 2 results in the Borough, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding has been used to part fund the employment of a specialist adviser/consultant to work in primary schools, especially those expected to miss the target of 65% or more of pupils achieving Key Stage 2 Level 4+. The initiative provided booster classes, specialist support to meet individual pupil's needs and the further development of teaching staff. Consequently, the level of performance of 11 year olds in the Borough's primary schools has steadily

improved since 2004 and in respect of science has exceeded the National Floor target of 85% (based on 2007 results).

With regard to Key Stage 3, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding was used to introduce new courses such as science in the 21st century, install interactive whiteboards and projectors in science laboratories and provide out of hours booster classes and revision support. Consequently, there are no schools where fewer than 50% of pupils failed to achieve Key Stage 3 level 5+ in English, Maths and Science.

There has also been a very significant increase in 5 A* - C GCSE attainment (Key Stage 4) in the Borough. The Borough average is 63.4%, which is 3.2% above the county average. The provisional GCSE results for 2008 show that all secondary schools in the borough have improved on their 2007 performance for the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C grades, including Maths and English. The improvement reflects the Neighbourhood Renewal investment and the considerable effort invested in collaborative working between schools and other learning providers to develop new and accessible curriculum courses and provide more choices that meet the needs of young people throughout the Borough.

Some of the above initiatives are continuing through mainstream funding such as the Key Stage 2 primary consultancy and the support for Shildon Sunnydale Community College for Maths and Computing.

It is important that Key Stage 2 and 4 results continue to be analysed at a local rather than county level to ensure that resources and initiatives are targeted on low performing schools/wards. With regard to Key Stage 3, the Government announced in October 2008 that it would be abolishing the tests in England.

With regard to the large number of 16 – 18 year olds who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group was established by Durham County Council to consider the actions that needed to ensure that young people in County Durham enjoyed better opportunities to participate in the labour market and ultimately contribute to their economic well being. The Group also investigated what actions needed to be taken to retain young people in education or training post 16 years.

The Working Group found that significant resources had been deployed to prevent young people becoming 'NEET' at 16, and a wide range of provision was available 16 -18 to attract young people into fulltime learning.

The Working Group's final report was considered by the County Council's Cabinet on 31st July 2008 and it was agreed that Director of Children and Young Peoples Services would prepare a response to the Group's recommendations on behalf of the County Council and the Children's Trust Executive Board, identifying early wins as appropriate, and include an Action Plan.

The County Council has recently been successful in securing £1.6 million of European Social Funding to address the issue of NEETs in County Durham.

Work Based and Adult Learning

Sedgefield Borough Council operated a training service from 1978 to October 2008 and its training centre was awarded good and outstanding provision in the delivery of NVQs by the Government's Adult Learning Inspectorate.

The Service's aims were:

- To increase the number of people with NVQ Level 2 or above qualifications through schemes such as Train to Gain, Entry to Employment and Apprenticeships.
- To engage young people in education and training through Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment Scheme and the BTEC Certificate in Construction
- To raise basic skills levels through the Entry to Employment Programme, Apprenticeships and Adult Programmes
- To support people back to work through the Gateway Initiative and Basic Employability Training

The Training Service has made a difference to the quality of life for many residents in the Borough. As an approved training provider for the Train To Gain Programme, the Service engaged with local businesses to improve productivity and competitiveness, by making sure that employees improve their skills within the workplace. The Training Service offered qualifications in business administration, customer services, manufacturing, trowel occupations (bricklaying), wood occupations (site and bench joinery) general operative construction (site operative). For the period 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2008, 103 participants (92.4%) achieved a NVQ Level 2 or 3 qualification. Accreditation was also achieved to deliver Level 4 qualifications in Management and Business and Administration to meet the demand of the local workforce.

The Council's Entry to Employment Programme has helped school leavers obtain basic qualifications in literacy and/or numeracy to assist them gain employment or undertake further training/education. 55% of the young people who undertook the Entry to Employment Programme with the Council from 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2008 progressed to a positive outcome.

To support people back into work, the Training Service ran the Gateway Initiative, which was 2 week programme focusing on interview techniques and job search. Basic Employability Training was also provided - a 13 or 26 week programme which placed emphasis on work placement and basic skills. The Gateway initiative has for the period 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2008 helped 30% of participants into employment and the Basic Employability Programme has achieved employment for 44% of participants.

The Service has also actively engaged with local employers to promote the employment of apprentices. For the period 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2008, the overall success rate of young people who have completed an apprenticeship programme with the Council was 69.66%.

Merger of Council's Training and Employment Service with Bishop Auckland College

Sedgefield Borough Council and Bishop Auckland College have recently merged their training services and a new Trades and Construction Training Centre will be built in Coulson Street, Spennymoor.

The main reasons for the merger were the changing nature of the contracting environment which favoured larger training organisations and the greater potential to improve choice, quality and access to training and learning opportunities for the people of the borough and South West Durham. In addition, a joint training service offers potential for strategic contracts with major building programmes such as the 'Building Schools For The Future Programme' to supply the skills needed and give opportunities for the Borough's residents that are currently not available.

The merged entity will have an annual turnover of £3.5m rising to over £4m over a three year period. It will also provide links to higher education establishments such as the University of Sunderland to provide franchise courses up to degree level.

The state-of-the-art centre will offer work-based training, such as brickwork, joinery, plumbing, electrical, tiling, kitchen fitting and painting and decorating as well as further education courses. It will also act as a centre of excellence for school-age pupils across South West Durham to explore vocational courses and to help unemployed people train for jobs.



Sedgefield Borough Training Centre in Coulson Street, Spennymoor and the adjacent land on which the new construction training centre will be built

The Work Place – Industrial Learning Centre

Young people aged between 14 to 19 are now able to undertake simulated work experience in fields such as health and social health, construction, media and leisure with the opening of the Work Place in September 2008 -an industrial learning centre at Heighington Lane, Newton Aycliffe. The centre

was built and equipped with funding from the Vocational Learning Trust (VOLT) - £4.9m and One NorthEast - £660,000.

The aim of the Work Place is to enrich the vocational curriculum, particularly in skill shortage areas, functional numeracy and maths, the sciences and functional literacy. Sessions at the centre will form part of the Government's vocational diplomas.

Community Learning - Sedgefield Learning Co-ordinator and Local Learning Partnerships

Sedgefield Borough Council and Sedgefield Local Strategic Partnership are committed to engaging the community in purposeful learning and have supported the employment of a Learning Borough Co-ordinator through Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and will continue to fund the post using Working Neighbourhoods Funding.

The Co-ordinator is actively involved in the establishment of Local Learning Partnerships throughout the borough, which are made up of representatives from the various centres that offer/deliver adult learning and Bishop Auckland College and Education in the Community as delivery partners. The Sedgefield Borough Learning Co-ordinator chairs these partnership meetings and co-ordinates activity on behalf of the partners.

The aim of the partnerships is to provide learning opportunities to those clients who are the hardest to reach by offering a range of non-accredited and accredited courses. These range from health, leisure, employment related and arts courses in community venues, whilst avoiding duplication of provision. A key element of the work is engaging clients and being able help clients to progress onto further learning and education through an effective referral process. This approach has been found to be successful.

CONCLUSION

Educational attainment at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 across the Borough and the learning opportunities available from community venues have increased considerably over recent years following the commissioning of services/interventions with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.

With Neighbourhood Renewal Funding having come to an end in March 2008, a number of the initiatives in schools will continue through mainstream or Single Programme funding and work is taking place with partners to develop a commissioning process for Working Neighbourhoods Fund to address the needs of the most disadvantaged residents in relation to education/skills training.

The merger of the Council's Training and Employment Service with Bishop Auckland College will improve the choice, quality and access to training and learning opportunities. It will also offer potential for strategic contracts with major building programmes such as Building Schools for the Future to supply the skills needed.

RECOMMENDATION

That the new authority takes on board the lessons learnt by Sedgefield Borough Council which are:

- Key Stage 2 and 4 results must continue to be analysed at a local rather than county level in order resources/initiatives can be targeted on low performing schools.
- Local/community interventions and the one to one person centred approaches to learning have been found to work well and should continue.
- Investment in apprenticeships must continue to ensure that local people have the skills that employers require and that links to public sector employment and major commissions for example 'Building Schools for the Future' be fully exploited.