

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
REGENERATION SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 5TH JANUARY, 2009**

Present: Councillor Mrs. E.M. Connor (Chair)
Councillors Mrs. S. Forster and C.A. Walker

Also present: Councillor R. Crute - Executive Member for Regeneration

Apologies: Councillors D. Raine, D.J. Taylor-Gooby
and Mrs. B.A. Sloan

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 8th December, 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 16th December, 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

3. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4. **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

(i) **East Durham Business Service**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Regeneration and Development which provided information on the performance of East Durham Business Service, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

A key area of work for the Economic Development Team had been the development of employability initiatives through the Disadvantaged Areas Fund (DAF) and the development of an Employability and Skills Strategy for the district. A local consortium of providers had recently been contracted to deliver the bulk of the DAF activity up to the end of March 2009.

In terms of capital project activity, consultants Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners had been commissioned to produce a comprehensive master plan for the industrial areas of Peterlee (North West, South West and Horden Sea View). This would focus on the key vacant sites and premises to determine their reuse potential and devise a costed market driven delivery plan to bring them back into use to meet market need and to improve the competitiveness of the area. It was anticipated that the full masterplan would be completed by the end of February 2009.

The apprenticeship programme had placed 48 young people with local businesses to date. The wage subsidy that helped employers meet the cost of taking on an apprentice continued to be successful and a total of twenty wage subsidies had been awarded. Once the Area Based Grant funding was confirmed, it would enable capacity to be increased by taking on two

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recruitment consultants to increase the number of young people commencing apprenticeships and to promote the new adult apprenticeships for those aged 25 and over.

The Tourism Officer continued to promote the Visit Britain Grading Scheme for existing and new accommodation provided in the district to increase the overall quality of accommodation.

It was explained that the network of 7 Be Enterprising Coaches funded through the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative and managed by EDBS had been successful in promoting and assisting local people to start up their own businesses. All coaches held regular surgeries in community venues throughout the district and worked closely with a wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations in their areas. So far this financial year, over 450 potential startup clients had been advised by the coaches with 192 new businesses being created to date.

EDBS held its annual Celebration of Enterprise night on the evening of 22nd October and for the first time included 'Enterprise Awards' sponsored by local companies. The event was a resounding success with 150 in attendance including representatives from over 40 new businesses. The winners were detailed in the report.

In terms of business growth, 35 companies had been advised to date with 9 expanding/relocating into the area. However, the credit crunch and global economic crisis was having an impact on businesses in the district and further effects were likely to be seen over the next 6 months. East Durham Business Service was working closely with partners such as Business and Enterprise North East, One North East and Jobcentre Plus in order to ensure that companies experiencing difficulties had access to the full range of support on offer and try to safeguard jobs where possible. In addition, East Durham Business Service was developing a flexible package of funding for smaller businesses in the district which required help to overcome short-term difficulties but that did not meet the criteria for support from other agencies.

A Member referred to the number of start-ups of businesses and queried how many continued. The Principal Economic Development Manager explained that the conversion rate was steady at over 80% who were still trading after the first year. He explained that the life coaches dealt with confidence issues as this was a key element to building self-confidence.

A Member queried if the District had a dedicated learning centre. The Principal Economic Development Manager explained that there was no single training centre in the district and local providers were used, for example, East Durham College and Springboard. As many local facilities and training opportunities were used as possible.

A Member queried if there was a single tourism information centre in the district. The Principal Economic Development Manager explained that there was no one point for tourism but there were centres around the district and tourism was a key economic drive for the future. Seaham had been highlighted as a key tourism destination for East Durham. The future direction of tourism was unknown because of the Local Government Review and a Tourism Strategy would need to be developed. There was a very large number of hits on the website for tourism.

A Member referred to the flexible package of funding and queried if this was a form of loan. The Principal Economic Development Manager explained that the flexible package of funding was still being worked upon but it was envisaged that it would be a flexible grant to ensure that businesses could continue trading and specialist advice may be given to help them.

A Member queried how the master plan for the industrial estates was progressing. The Principal Economic Development Manager explained that the consultants had been doing a lot of research and a report was expected imminently. It was hoped that it would target key premises and sites.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted

(ii) **Asset and Property Management**

The Chair explained that this report had been deferred until the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5. ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

6. BRACKENHILL/WHITEHOUSE BUSINESS PARK (AOB)

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that a briefing paper had been received from Dave Wafer, Durham County Council and had been previously circulated to Members. A meeting had been held between tenants, East Durham Business Service, Highways Agency and Durham County Council and it had been agreed that an area-wide travel plan should be developed for the business park and the surrounding industrial estates.

The group had prepared a scoping report which was presented to East Durham Business Service and the document contained measures necessary to begin the travel plan process along with the details of the pump prime required. Following the measures outlined in the scoping report, it was envisaged that the framework travel plan would be funded through external sponsorship. East Durham Business Service had agreed to seek funding for pump priming actions in the scoping report through a bid to Area Based Grants. Work would commence in the final quarter of the financial year.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.