

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27 February 2014

Update on Members' Reference Group – Implications of changes in Government funding and policy on the economy of County Durham



Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information on the progress of the Members' Reference Group looking at the implications of changes in Government funding and policy on the economy of County Durham.

Background

- 2 The Reference Group was established as a result of members' concern at changes in policy and funding that was being introduced by Government and how that would impact upon the economy of County Durham. This had been highlighted as an area for inclusion in the 2012/13 work programme of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3 At the meeting of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 24 June 2013 during the consideration of the work programme reference was made to the Members' Reference Group which had been established in January, 2013 to look at the impact of changes in Government funding and policy on the economy of County Durham. It was explained that the Reference Group had met only once on the 10 January 2013 where the decision had been taken by Members that any further meetings would be held following the May 2013 election when the membership of the Group would be refreshed.
- 4 Following the May election the group has had seven meetings with an update provided to the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on the 21 October 2013 which provided Members with detail of the scrutiny activity undertaken by the Reference Group at meetings held in June, July and October, 2013.
- 5 The final meeting of the Reference Group was held on the 28 January 2014 and it was thought timely that the committee receives an update on the progress with a view to the final report of the Members' Reference Group being considered by the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on the 7 April 2014.

- 6 Arrangements have therefore been made for a short presentation to be provided to the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny focusing on:
- Background.
 - Approach.
 - Key issues.
 - Recommendations
 - Next Steps.

Members' Reference Group - activity

- 7 The first meeting of the Members' Reference Group on the 25 June 2013 consisted of an overview presentation, setting the scene for Members providing information on the economic context, funding and investment examples, a suggested approach to analysing the impact and suggested next steps. In addition, the Members agreed the terms of reference for the group including key lines of inquiry and the project plan.
- 8 At the second meeting of the group held on the 18 July 2013 the focus was on the scale of the changes in Government funding, looking at the impact on a national basis and comparing this to the impact in relation to County Durham including the impact of funding and policy changes on the public sector. This session helped to identify gaps in resources looking at previous funding provision and comparing it to current levels of funding provision.
- 9 The third meeting of the Reference Group was held on the 16 October 2013 and provided a summary of the following:
- What had been affected? – Identification of various policy areas relating to the economy which have been affected by changes in Government funding.
 - Where within the County had been affected? – Assess the impact of changes in Government funding and policy on the various communities within County Durham.
 - Who had been affected? – An overview identifying who has been affected.
- 10 At the fourth meeting of the Group on the 18 November Members were provided with information on work currently being undertaken by Durham County Council and partners to tackle the impact of changes in Government funding and policy within County Durham focusing on interventions in relation to employment and business support.
- 11 The fifth meeting of the Group focused on the interventions and support provided by Jobcentre Plus in relation to getting people back into employment and various initiatives to support business.
- 12 In addition, at the meeting of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 9 December 2013 Members received a report from Business Durham which highlighted the support they currently offer to large and small companies within County Durham. It was felt by Members that the information provided by Business Durham identifying current business support should be included within the final report of the Members' Reference Group.

- 13 During the early stages of scoping the project it was determined by the Members Reference Group that they would visit a partner within County Durham to see 'first-hand' the work currently being undertaken in relation to business support and increasing employment opportunities. On the 13 January 2014 the Members' Reference Group visited Bishop Auckland College to see how they develop training to meet the needs of employers and improve the employment opportunities for communities within County Durham.
- 14 The last meeting of the Members' Reference Group was held on the 28 January and involved identifying the key issues for members from the work undertaken and the determination of recommendations.

Next Steps

- 15 The draft report has been shared with the Members of the Reference Group for consideration and comment. The comments made have been incorporated into the report which will be considered by the Assistant Chief Executive's Management Team and the Regeneration and Economic Development Management Team. The report will then be considered by the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on the 7 April 2014 before it is shared with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

Recommendations

- 16 That the Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the information provided in the report and presentation.
- 17 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive the final report of the Members' Reference Group at the meeting on the 7 April 2014.

Background papers:

- Member's Reference Group – Implications of Government funding and policy changes on the economy of County Durham – Terms of Reference and Project Plan – meeting on the 25 June 2013.
- Presentations from the Member's Reference Group meetings held on the 25 June, 18 July, 16 October, 18 November and 5 December.
- Report to the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 December 2013 – Business Support and the role of Business Durham.
- Presentation by Bishop Auckland College – 13 January 2014.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – It is intended that the information considered by the Member’s Reference Group and any resulting recommendations will be used by the Service Grouping to determine/target future provision including funding.

Staffing - None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity – An Equality Impact Assessment may be required to be undertaken by the Service Grouping carrying out the implementation of the recommendations.

Accommodation – None

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights - None

Consultation - None

Procurement - None

Disability Discrimination Act - None

Legal Implications - None