

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of the **Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 2 November 2017** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Batey (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Adam, J Atkinson, J Clare, M Clarke, R Crute, M Davinson, T Henderson, P Howell, L Maddison, J Maitland, R Manchester, R Ormerod, A Patterson, A Reed, E Scott, L Taylor and M Wilson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Jopling, P Sexton and Mr T Batson.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held 26 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillors A Batey and A Patterson both declared an interest in relation to Item 10, Scrutiny Review of Support provided by DCC to the Retail Sector in County Durham, having their own retail businesses.

5 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

6 Media Relations

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Diane Close referred Members to the recent prominent articles and news stories relating to the remit of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

The articles included: Durham Oktoberfest, held at the Xcel Centre, Newton Aycliffe, where the main item for discussion was Brexit; a new General Manager having been appointed at South West Durham Training (SWDT); Hitachi rail announcing an initial 7 trains having been supplied to the Great Western route, with a further 50 to be delivered; and a local builders firm from Chester-le-Street, McCarrick construction, being honoured for its work in relation to apprenticeships, winning Small Employer of the year for the North East region in the National Apprenticeships Awards.

Councillor J Clare asked the Committee to note that Hitachi was one of five companies that had been shortlisted for the £2.75 Billion HS2 contract.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 Masterplans - Progress

The Chairman introduced the Spatial Policy Team Leader, Graeme Smith along with the Regeneration Projects Manager Chris Myers and Community Economic Development Manager, Wendy Benson who were in attendance to give an update as regards the Masterplans for County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Spatial Policy Team Leader reminded the Committee of the previous updates given in relation to the Masterplans, for the largest 12 towns within the County, and noted that all first round Masterplans were in place. He noted that each plan was individual, each different, with some being "Masterplans", with others being "Development Frameworks" or "Regeneration Frameworks". He added that having such plans in place did not preclude any projects or opportunities that may come up from being taken forward. The Committee noted a suite of Masterplan update documents, confirming current actions and future confirmed actions. Members noted that they had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting in December 2016 and January 2017 and were subject to discussions within the Area Action Partnerships (AAPs). The Spatial Policy Team Leader explained that the second round of "full" Masterplans were in development, an ongoing and staged programme with each full plan taking around 18 months to complete and have in place. Councillors noted that the Chester-le-Street Masterplan was currently being developed working with a number of teams, including Highways and Tourism. He added that the first round of consultation had begun in respect of the Bishop Auckland Masterplan and the Consett Masterplan was at early stages. Reference was also made to the importance of Neighbourhood Plans and to the ongoing activity in Newton Aycliffe, Durham and Stanley all of which would influence the wider masterplans in those areas.

The Regeneration Projects Manager noted that in respect of recent delivery at Barnard Castle, a condition survey had been prepared in relation to the Market Cross, and it had been found to be in reasonable condition for its age. We are planning on undertaking a programme of works to repair and restore the Grade I listed building, with works to be carried out next year. He added a number of target business improvement (TBI) scheme works for the town centre would also be undertaken.

The Regeneration Projects Manager explained in respect of Bishop Auckland that there were works ongoing in respect of the market place tower, and car park extension at North Bondgate. It was noted that works were in the context of the wider improvements linked to the regeneration of the Castle, opening in early 2018.

The Community Economic Development Manager noted that DCC teams were working together to submit a bid for funding to deliver flood prevention and improvement works around the culvert and marketplace. She added that work was ongoing with landowners in terms of bringing forward vacant properties.

The Community Economic Development Manager noted for Consett, a design concept and delivery framework for Middle Street had been completed and permissions had been secured for a replica "Consett Clock", with planning permission to be submitted.

The Regeneration Projects Manager explained that for Durham City, work with the Durham Business Improvement District (BID) had resulted in the installation of digital totems, three in total, one commissioned at Millennium Place, the other two being at Elvet and North Road, yet to be commissioned. It was noted that of the three digital screens on the totems, two would contain Durham BID information, with one to allow the Council to display information to residents and on DCC activities. It was added that TBI activities had been carried out at The Station House, North Road, to brighten up this area, a gateway being in proximity to the rail and bus stations.

The Regeneration Projects Manager noted for Newton Aycliffe the Chapter Homes development at Eden Field was progressing with, at the end of October, 32 properties sold, 15 properties let and 52 properties reserved of the 135 dwellings. The Community Economic Development Manager noted that the library works had been completed, with a new Customer Access Point, with off-site improvement works to start late December.

The Committee noted that in respect of Peterlee, consultation was ongoing in respect of the relocation of the library, with two all-day sessions having been held, and feedback received as regards the issue of car parking.

It was explained that in terms of Seaham Marina and the Seaham Water Sports Centre, a Watersports Development Officer had been employed as regards the opportunities and physical activities, linking with schools to help them meet their curriculum activities. It was added that the project had won the Chair's Award from the Royal Town Planning Institute's North East Planning Excellence 2017 awards.

The Community Economic Development Manager noted that Seaham Town Centre had a number of public realm works completed at Railway Street, with some further works to take place.

It was added that a stakeholder event held in September 2017 had helped to support a Townscape Heritage Application of £1.5 million, with information on the success of the bid to be received in May 2018.

Councillors noted for Shildon that consultation as regards arches was concluded and works were being undertaken to refurbish and enhance. It was added that works would be carried out in terms of refurbishment of street furniture.

The Community Economic Development Manager noted the work continued in terms of bringing forward development at Festival Walk and consultation was being prepared in terms of the future of the market place. It was added that support of the redevelopment of the North Eastern continued.

Members noted that the works to the South of Front Street at Stanley had been completed and planning had been approved for an Aldi Store and for Home Bargains. It was added that designs were being developed for further areas including the North of Front Street and links to the car parks.

The Committee noted a snapshot in terms of the support being given to the retail sector, with: 391 enquires from businesses; ongoing engagement with 62 businesses; 16 projects being delivered; and 4 subsidised courses being delivered, digital marketing, health and safety, visual window display and marketing.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their report and presentation and asked Members for their comments and questions.

Councillor A Patterson noted the Masterplans referred to the 12 main settlements in the County and asked why there had not been a slide referring to Crook. The Community Economic Development Manager noted the presentation had represented the updates since the last report to Committee, and there had not been any additional information as regards Crook, however it was noted the a former depot site was up for sale, with interest from a food retailer, and there was also streetscape designs and TBI offer in addition, for example at the Post Office.

Councillor L Maddison noted that in respect of the Spennymoor there is to be a consultation regarding the market place and asked that local members be provided with copies of the consultation documentation. The Community Economic Development Manager explained it was hoped to dovetail with Festival Walk work and that the consultation should be available in November to send a copy to the member. Councillor L Maddison noted perception was for work to begin in February 2018, and added that in terms of delays involving some privately owned land that was derelict in the centre of the town, she would be prepared to look to use Member Initiative Fund (MIF) to try and help. She also asked if it would be possible to improve the exterior of the North Eastern building temporarily, until the Masterplan was in place.

The Community Economic Development Manager noted that in terms of some private land and those in administration it was difficult to try and deal with those. In respect of the North Eastern Building, it was explained that it was on the list for TBI, though not for works until the full development, however the Authority would push for extra value.

Councillor R Crute noted the format and approach of the Masterplans, understanding the 12 main settlements in terms of helping to improve our economy and looking at services and investment. He reminded the Committee that there are a number of smaller settlements outside of those 12 and asked what benefit there was for them. The Spatial Policy Team Leader noted that smaller settlements could have documents developed for them, and that the CDP would be relevant for all settlements and that Neighbourhood Plans could be developed. He reiterated that Masterplans for areas did not preclude any additional schemes coming forward.

Councillor J Atkinson noted the last slide referred to training for customer services and he added he felt this was very important as retail not only sells the products, it also helps sell the area too, and asked if there had been any feedback on this. The Community Economic Development Manager noted that last year retailers had been asked as regards skills and qualifications and they had noted that retailers wanted the “softer” skills rather than qualifications. It was added that accordingly there had been work internally and with partners in terms of the training and the take up had been good, albeit they were subsidised, and the aim was now to look to commercialise this training.

The Regeneration Projects Manager noted that at Bishop Auckland there was significant experience in terms of tourism, with Bishop Auckland having being designated as a “World Host” town, it was noted this would include all customer facing services undergoing training, such as taxi drivers, shop workers. It was added that the Local Member, Councillor J Allen had helped with a contribution from her MIF and the Community Economic Development Manager added that they had achieved the status and were the first to do so in the North East.

Councillor J Clare noted that Neighbourhood Plans were not for setting out an aspirational vision for an area, they did not have the same aim as Masterplans; rather Neighbourhood Plans were to look at planning issues, use of land, assets and restrictions. He added that for issues outside of planning that a Parish Plan maybe more appropriate. Councillor J Clare added he felt the overview of the main settlements was useful as it afforded the opportunity to see what projects had been developed in other areas and use them if appropriate. He noted in terms of “run down areas”, planning blight was an issue that received a big push 3-4 years ago and this could be an angle to force owners to address problems. He echoed the comments made by Councillor J Atkinson in terms of good customer service and welcomed the World Host status of Bishop Auckland and noted it would be great if there could be a “World Host County”. Councillor J Clare welcomed the slide in terms of retail, noting this was going to be an area of work a Review Group would be looking at. He asked as regards the Community Economic Team and in terms of TBI, who was the person to contact. The Community Economic Development Manager noted she was the relevant Officer to speak to in that regard.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress report and presentation on Masterplans.
- (ii) That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives a further progress report on an annual basis on the development and implementation of the various masterplans.

8 NECA Transport Activity - Overview

The Chairman introduced the Head of Transport and Contract Services, Adrian White who was in attendance to give an overview as regards North East Combined Authority (NECA) Transport Activity (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Transport and Contract Services reminded the Committee that when the NECA was formed in April 2014 it took on the role of "Transport Authority" for the whole area covering the seven NECA Local Authorities: County Durham; Gateshead; Newcastle; North Tyneside; Northumberland; South Tyneside; and Sunderland. He noted this had included the responsibility in terms of producing a Local Transport Plan. Members were reminded that NECA had delegated back, to County Durham and Northumberland, the operational delivery of public transport, with Nexus having the responsibility for the Tyne and Wear Authorities. It was reiterated that NECA retained that responsibility for strategy and policy, being able to look in terms of economic and planning issues at a regional level.

The Committee were reminded that NECA would respond to national issues, for example to the Department for Transport (DfT), such as the "Northern Powerhouse" and other issues as set out within the report. The Head of Transport and Contract Services explained that NECA, along with the Tees Valley Combined Authority, Cumbria and North Yorkshire had established a unique partnership with Northern Rail in establishing the North East Rail Management Unit (NERMU) to co-manage the rail franchise in the North East.

The Head of Transport and Contract Services also noted that in respect of local transport that the NECA Transport Team worked closely with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) in relation to major transport capital investments, for example Horden Station, a prioritised scheme attracting £3.34m from regional funding.

Members noted ongoing issues, such as the North of Tyne Mayor, the Metro/Tyne and Wear and added that while there was a lot of good work ongoing there were still a number of challenges ahead.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Transport and Contract Services for his update report and asked Members for their comments and questions.

Councillor J Clare noted that it was vital to adopt a regional approach and that it was important to hang on to NECA. He added that devolution was complex, however the benefits in terms of the economy and transport were vital and splintering would be bad.

Councillor J Atkinson noted that many trains from London stop at York and Darlington, but not Durham station and also noted that the line came very close to the Newton Aycliffe Trading Estate. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that the issue in terms of stopping on the mainline at Durham was historic, and always there is a fight for more trains to stop at Durham, with more doing so recently as Durham has had more passengers than Darlington in the last two years. It was noted however, that Durham was a through station, while Darlington was an interchange hub, linking to Bishop Auckland and Tees Valley. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that in relation to creating any additional stops, this would be difficult as there was not enough space in the timetable.

He added there was the Bishop Auckland branch line, near to Hitachi, and that there were schemes, for example working with “Recyke y Bike” to make cycles available for the staff to make the one mile journey. It was noted the hourly service from Bishop Auckland was a huge improvement.

Councillor R Crute noted that NECA had strategic responsibility and asked if there was a split, what implications could there be for the Council, both strategically and financially. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that it was hugely complicated and that in terms of Tyne and Wear, if there was a split there would be a need for management arrangements for Nexus, or there is the possibility of a Joint Committee of “North of Tyne” and “South of Tyne” that could operate. He noted that he felt that “Transport for the North” would not have conversations with each Local Authority and that there would need to be some mechanism to be able to lobby regionally.

Councillor J Maitland noted the train travelling from Sunderland to London did not stop at Seaham and asked whether this could be possible, taking pressure off Durham. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that the operators on the East Line paid fares into a pot and the split they then received was based upon the number of services provided and how fast they ran and accordingly, additional stops could make the services unviable. He noted conversations as regards the new station at Horden and that the issue is the time impact upon journeys when considering new stops.

Councillor J Clare asked as regards a link from the Main East Coast Line to Newton Aycliffe, the Forrest Park phase 2, and a rail interchange. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that the market had been approached as regards the idea, having a useful site next to the motorway with good links. He added that there was good potential; however it was at a very early stage.

Councillor P Howell noted that NECA was complex and asked how reassured could the “South of Tyne” be in terms of transport issues. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that the NECA transport team was based at Newcastle, however he reminded NECA that the NECA boundary extended down to the Tees Valley and also there were links directly to Highways England and the DfT, as well as looking to align where possible with the Tees Valley Combined Authority as appropriate.

Councillor A Patterson noted that if the East Coast Line was “full” what implications did this have in terms of Durham City and regeneration. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that the “Northern Powerhouse” in relation to rail was about connectivity, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle. He added that while we could champion Durham’s case, the “Northern Powerhouse” was a push for speed, for example Leeds to Newcastle was currently 90 minutes, with an aim to reduce this to 60 minutes. He added that NECA would push the case for the whole NECA area. It was added that improving capacity was a different issue, with Darlington Station being a constraint in terms of cross over lines. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that with a mix of freight, local and fast trains, there was a need to leave bigger “gaps” to allow for the different types to operate together on two-track lines. He added that you would need four-track, or sections where you could separate off freight to allow fast trains to pass. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted that there would be a need to look to help in terms of the resilience of the services.

Councillor J Atkinson asked as regards whether a Darlington relief road would be likely. The Head of Transport and Contract Services noted the Tees Valley Combined Authority working with Highways England and together with Garden Village proposals and possible objections to new roads being developed; a scheme may come forward in around 5 years or so.

Resolved:

That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress report.

9 Local Transport Plan - Progress

The Chairman introduced the Traffic Management Section Manager, Dave Lewin who was in attendance to give detail of progress with the Local Transport Plan (LTP) (for copy see file of minutes).

The Traffic Management Section Manager reminded Members of the introduction of "LTP1" in 2001, with the current "LTP3" being now in effect for six years. He added that they have been initially in five year blocks; however, the Transport Act (2008) removed this requirement. Members noted that the current LTP had been agreed by Cabinet in April 2011. Members were reminded that the LTP was to provide a transport strategy and delivery plan that supported economic growth in County Durham.

The Committee was referred to the table at page 28 of the agenda papers setting out the five national transport goals, complimented by a sixth transport goal for County Durham of "maintenance of the transport asset", reflecting the importance of the existing transport network. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted that the number one priority was "a stronger economy through regeneration", with maintaining the transport asset being the number two priority.

The Traffic Management Section Manager referred Members to information relating to capital funding, based on two formula based block allocations of the integrated transport block (ITB) and maintenance block, with a table setting out funding from 2011/12 through to 2017/18. It was added that, as part of the initial year of the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) the Council's ITB funding was uplifted by £506,000 to be used locally towards relieving congestion, the recent works at Neville's Cross Junction. It was added that the 2017/18 financial year was the last year for which the DfT had allocated funding for the blocks, future years being currently shown as indicative.

The Committee noted Appendix 2 to the report set out delivery area information, relating to: sustainable travel; economic/transport corridors; the whole-town approach; and maintaining the transport asset. The Traffic Management Section Manager reminded Members of the relationship with NECA, and the delegation back to DCC in terms of the LTP and that "LTP3" would stay in place and deliver accordingly.

The Chairman thanked the Traffic Management Section Manager for his update report and asked Members for their comments and questions.

Councillor J Atkinson asked how much engagement there was with taxi companies and in terms of walking and cycling he noted with interest the ideas in terms of environment. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted that the Taxi Licensing Liaison Group met bi-annually, with the Traffic Management Section Manager attending. He noted that it was difficult in terms of all the competing demands in terms of kerb space, however there was engagement. In terms of cycling, the Traffic Management Section Manager noted there were various groups, including the Durham University "Durham Bicycle User Group" and teams working at the Council.

Councillor R Ormerod noted that Government seemed to be committed in terms of electric vehicle charging and asked long term were we ready in County Durham. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted recent reports in terms of the readiness of the National Grid in terms of large scale electric charging, with sub-stations not being ready to cope. He added in terms of County Durham the introduction of current charging points, that may take three or four hours to charge, may not be the best option for the City centre as we would want a turnover of visitors for business. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted that therefore increasing the number of charging points at the Park and Ride facilities which offered longer stays may be more beneficial. He added that as regards the two charging points at Old Elvet, Officers were getting information as regards power usage to be able to understand the way those charging spaces were being used. Members noted that there were requests in terms of the installation of charging points for private dwellings, and there would need to be development of a policy on this as there were a number of issues.

Councillor A Reed noted the small village of Fir Tree near Crook which had no public transport and asked if there were any plans as there were a number of elderly residents and if schoolchildren missed the school bus there was no service bus they could then catch. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted he would take up the issues with the Passenger Transport Section and get back to the Councillor. Councillor A Reed asked as regards how to request a bus shelter for the school children waiting for their bus. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted this area was not straightforward as there were a number of potential issues, such as anti-social behaviour to consider, and he would speak to the Councillor in respect of the issue.

Councillor L Maddison noted schemes in terms of use of cycles, to be then left at agreed spots. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted such schemes had been looked at, however, there would be many issues to look at in terms of where to park, safety, how to hire and use the cycles. He added that Durham was very hilly and in that respect perhaps did not lend itself to such schemes, however, he would speak to the Council's Sustainable Travel Officer, Victoria Lloyd-Gent to get an update in this regard.

Councillor E Adam noted that the main priority was "a stronger economy through regeneration" and asked whether transport capacity was an issue being addressed within the LTP. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted that the strategy was to encourage the use of other modes of transport other than car, for example cycling or public transport, and schemes such as cross-ticketing and the provision of wifi on public transport could help.

Councillor E Adam noted that in looking to encourage the use of cycling, rail and buses, was this factored against the cost and time of these incentives, the economics of it. The Traffic Management Section Manager noted that in terms of the LTP, bus companies noted that improvements, such as the SCOOT system, had helped in terms of reliability in timetables and that cycling schemes offered a choice, with some being off-road, not mixing with traffic.

Resolved:

That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress report.

10 Scrutiny Review of Support provided by DCC to the Retail Sector in County Durham

The Chairman asked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer to present the report relating to the Scrutiny Review of Support provided by DCC to the Retail Sector in County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted the report set out the national, regional and local context in terms of strategies, policies and statistics. She added that the current support provided by DCC and partners such as local Enterprise Agencies, Durham BID, AAPs, North East Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. Members were referred to the draft terms of reference as set out at pages 46-48 and asked to note in respect of engagement the review group would receive information from key partners and also from letting agents. It was added that visits would be undertaken to provide an opportunity for Members to engage with local retailers.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that the Membership would consist of around 10 Members, including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee, along with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as ex-officio members. Members were asked to express their interest with the Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

The Chairman thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer and noted that topics evolve and that other issues may also need to be considered by the Committee and therefore the project plan may be subject to some changes as required. The Chairman asked Members for their comments and questions.

Councillor E Adam noted he felt the terms of reference were ok, however, asked as regards outcomes, impact and delivery in terms of helping retail to tackle issue they have. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that the review group would be led by key findings, which would then be used to lead to a set of outcomes.

Councillor R Crute noted that he suspected that a number of issues will emerge that will be outside of the Council's control, however, it would be important to look to identify gaps and where the Council and partners could provide influence and support.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Gwilym noted that one anticipated outcome would be to raise awareness amongst Councillors in terms of the mechanisms of support available to the retail sector, to then be able to identify gaps and look to help in those areas.

Councillor J Clare noted he welcomed the review group, having been an issue he had noted for 3 years. He added that he thought the framework for the review was very good, and that it was important to raise awareness of what was being offered and to shout louder about good work and any areas that needed changes or where gaps were identified. Councillor J Clare noted that this would need to be within the resources that were available and that there was no “magic wand” and therefore it would be important to manage expectations, while still trying to find any funding sources to try and plug any gaps.

Councillor L Maddison asked if the review group would be looking at the issues that lead people to move out of the retail sector. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer noted that one of the first sessions would have an Officer from Spatial Planning to help give a picture in terms of retail, how it was changing and the causes.

Councillor R Ormerod noted he also welcomed this review group and asked how Members would seek to be considered for the group. The Chairman asked Members to consider the commitment as set out in the project plan and to then speak to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer if they wished to be part of the review group.

Resolved:

That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree the Terms of Reference and Project Plan as set out in the report.