

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th January, 2012

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Cossins, Harman, L. Hughes, Lawton, Lewis, E.A. Richmond and Wright. (10)

APOLOGIES – Councillor Grundy. (1)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Coultas, Johnson and H. Scott. (3)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Steve Petch, Head of Place, Strategy and Commissioning and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P10. As Councillor Coultas was in attendance, the Chair, Councillor Long, again advised the Committee that Councillor Coultas was no longer a Member of this Scrutiny Committee and requested that the thanks of Scrutiny Committee be conveyed to him for his valuable input as a Place Scrutiny Committee Member.

P11. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5th November, 2011.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

P12. MATTERS ARISING – (1) Pursuant to Minute P5(c)/Nov/11, Members were advised that a Scrutiny Workshop had been held on 15th November, 2011 at which all members were invited. If it was warranted a further Workshop would be arranged.

(2) Pursuant to Minute P6(b(ix))/Nov/11, Members were advised that arrangements were in hand to provide this Training Session.

P13. SCRUTINY – WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 – The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

The submitted report outlined those areas where this Scrutiny Committee had previously identified it would like to focus its work over the next Municipal Year namely, Civil Parking Enforcement, Economic Strategy, Local Development Framework and Transformation Projects. Cabinet had requested views on the proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan and this Committee has established a Review Group to consider the proposals within its remit.

Discussion ensued on the Transformation Projects relevant to this Committee and to a Members Briefing on the Housing Strategy which was being arranged for January/February.

RESOLVED – (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the proposals in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

P14. DARLINGTON'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided an update on the collection process being undertaken to evidence the Economic Strategy and to set out emerging key messages and future actions. A PowerPoint presentation accompanied the report.

Members were advised that the project was to prepare an Economic Strategy that was relevant to the business community of Darlington, would be lead by and shaped by businesses in its development and implemented by and on behalf of them. The recently prepared Local Economic Assessment provided some understanding of local economic conditions and there was now a need to be clear about economic opportunities and strengths in order to realise the opportunities and focus both public and private resources.

References were made to the different economic conditions and new relationships developing both on a world and local scale. The importance of the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (TV LEP) in driving the economic agenda was critical in both regeneration and government policy. There was a need to ensure that Darlington was well positioned in the overall TV LEP Business Plan so that there was a differentiated role for the Darlington economy within the Sub Region.

The Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) Statement of Ambition set out an economic vision for the Tees Valley for the next 15 years, focussed on two key Ambitions. The TVU Business Plan considers how the partnership will work towards achieving these ambitions, identifying four-year Objectives and shorter term Priority Actions. The five key Objectives will help in achieving the ambitions by creating the right environment to maximise growth and economic success. The steps for delivery and milestones identified in the Business Plan will be reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis to ensure the plan stays live.

It is important that the emerging Darlington Economic Strategy reflects the Statement of Ambition and the Business Plan, as well as influencing further iterations of those documents as the Darlington Strategy will identify detailed investment opportunities and delivery initiatives.

Discussion ensued on the role of Durham Tees Valley Airport, lack of a manufacturing skills workforce and the steps being undertaken to address this, environmental aspects of the strategy, lack of employment opportunities for young people, constraints of Darlington's infrastructure affecting business prospects and opportunities available at Central Park.

Particular reference was made to the need to ensure that Darlington had an effective broadband infrastructure both for businesses and town centre access.

Members were advised that a Conference was due to be held in late February where a summary of evidence collected would be presented and discussed.

Scrutiny Committee participated in the completion of a Sector TOWS analysis of the public sector in Darlington to determine Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats as part of the consultation exercise.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to Mr. Petch and Ms. White for their informative presentation.

(b) That the current position in the development of the Economic Strategy be noted.

(c) That a Task and Finish Review Group be established to give consideration to broadband access within Darlington.