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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee has undertaken :-
  - (a) **Medium Term Financial Plan** – A special meeting was held to give further consideration to the draft Medium-Term Financial Plan following the feedback received on initial proposals released in November 2010 and the Local Government Finance Settlement received in December 2010. Members received an overview of the financial position, Government grants and the pressures facing the Council over the next few years. Members scrutinised the impact of the proposals relevant to this Scrutiny Committee and forwarded recommendations to a special meeting of Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 7th February, 2011.
  - (b) **Business Support for Small Medium Enterprises (SME)** – As part of our work on Worklessness which we undertook following the Director of Public Health’s Annual Report 2008/09 ‘Healthier Lives for Children and Young People Living in County Durham and Darlington’ Mr. Jonathan Lamb, Business and Enterprise North East gave Scrutiny an overview of the services it provided for SME within the Tees Valley
  - (c) **Economic Overview** – We considered a report which gave a ‘snapshot’ of Darlington’s economy as at January 2011 including employment rates, levels of worklessness, benefits, wage levels and qualification levels. Christine Livingstone of Jobcentre Plus attended Scrutiny to give an overview of available employment opportunities, current trends and changes in the benefit system that were to be implemented.
  - (d) **Work Programme 2010/11** – We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Municipal Year and will continue to update and add to our Work Programme for the remainder of the Year. We also examined Cabinet’s Forward Plan, in order to identify areas of particular interest or concern to be included within our Work Programme and gave consideration to topics/subjects that we might wish to review/scrutinise..
  - (e) **Cycling Through the Town Centre** – As part of Scrutiny monitoring we received an update report on Cycling Activities through the Darlington Town Centre for the period 1st January to 31st December, 2010. The data was collected by various methods and suggests that cycling continues to increase across Darlington and at high levels through the Town Centre. It also shows that no personal injury accidents have been recorded by the Police and incidents reported to the Transport Policy Team do not show any collisions between a cyclist and a pedestrian. We have agreed to continue to monitor the situation on an Annual basis.

- (f) **Darlington Open Space Strategy 2010 Update** – Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee were informed of the key changes that have taken place to publicly accessible open spaces since the Strategy was adopted in 2007. Since adoption, work has been undertaken to advance policies and address issues identified in the Strategy and its Action Plan. The Strategy Update Report 2010 provides an overview of the condition of the publicly accessible open spaces and a full version is available in the Members' Room.
- (g) **Tree and Woodland Strategy 2010 to 2015** – Scrutiny were given a final opportunity to comment on the Tree and Woodland Strategy prior to its submission to Cabinet. The Strategy set out the policy framework in local, regional and national context and determines how the Borough Council will manage its trees overall. Consultation on the Strategy has taken place with various bodies and organisations and a five year action plan has been formulated arising from the Strategy.
- (h) **Darlington's Meadows** – As part of Scrutiny's Annual Countryside Tours we were advised of the works that had been undertaken to areas within Darlington to encourage biodiversity. The work involved a reduced grass cutting regime which encouraged more wildlife and wildflowers to the areas.
- (i) **Greener Darlington Theme Group** - The Committee welcomed the opportunity to be informed of the current work of the Greener Darlington Theme Group.

Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended the following meetings :-

- (a) Various briefing meeting with Officers.
- (b) Prosperous Theme Group on 16<sup>th</sup> February.
- (c) Association of North East Councils with Arts Council England meeting at the Arts Centre.
- (d) Training on Rights of Way on 17<sup>th</sup> February.
- (e) Special Cabinet on the Medium Term Financial Plan on 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

**Councillor Dorothy Long**  
**Chair of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee**