

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 February 2009

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. This Committee has met once since the last full Council meeting and the main area of work that I would like to highlight is set out below.

Committee Meeting

2. The Committee met on 16 January with the main focus of the agenda being the economic downturn and its impact within North Yorkshire. Representatives of the Federation for Small Businesses (FSB) and Business Link attended the meeting and a paper was presented by Gary Fielding, Assistant Chief Executive, Policy, Performance and Partnerships and Paul Whitaker, Head of Economic Development covering the County Council's response to the economic downturn.
3. The FSB represent small businesses to national and local government and there are 3250 members within the North Yorkshire branch. The Regional Chairman, Simon Williams, and Regional Secretary, David Cox were able to give valuable input on the challenges faced by small businesses at this time and had contacted all members prior to the meeting to invite their comments. The FSB presented proposals that they felt would help members and these included actions to improve local procurement and proposals to allow more flexibility in how business rates are paid. Gary Fielding will be responding to the FSB on the issues raised and the committee will be kept informed of this.
4. Business Link attended to give an update to the Committee. Business Link has launched a number of initiatives to provide additional support to businesses at this time including the launch of a Yorkshire Forward funded £1.4 million package. A "health check" providing up to £2000 of accountancy support is available through Business Link and credit crunch workshops focusing on cash flow, access to finance and 'smart' marketing has been launched. Fact sheets have been developed on a range of relevant issues and a publicity campaign using TV, radio and newspapers has been launched. Business Link are working in partnership with NYCC in a number of ways including use of libraries for drop in sessions, promotion of services and help on our website, articles in NY Times and joint "Meet the Buyer" events.
5. Gary Fielding updated members on action being taken by NYCC in response to the economic downturn focusing on supporting people, businesses and other groups including the voluntary sector. The Council already provides an extensive range of support activity, not least of which is continuing to deliver the key services to support children, families and the elderly. Increases in demand on frontline services are expected and NYCC is working closely with partners to ensure a consolidated approach. With regard to supporting businesses, we

were encouraged by the focus to support the key agencies providing business support, particularly the joint initiatives described earlier with Business Link.

6. The Committee will continue to receive regular reports on the economic situation and this will include statistics. Obtaining a clear picture of the economic downturn is difficult given the time lag in economic data and officers are currently working on obtaining regular information across a range of relevant measures. The Committee looks forward to receiving these.
7. It must be recognised that the economic situation, particularly in relation to the value of the pound, may provide opportunity for areas such as tourism. The Committee will be looking at this at a future meeting and has arranged for a presentation from Yorkshire Tourist Board at its May meeting.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN SAVAGE
Chairman, Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Hall
Northallerton

9 February 2008