

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 7 APRIL 2008

Present: Councillors J Kane (Chairman); D Banks; J Bowman; H Wormstrup; Mrs M Docherty; D Moore; J Prince; R Salkeld; G Scurrah; N Clarkson; C Whiteside and A Wonnacott.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E Brenan; W Southward and A Carroll.

Also present: Councillors Mrs Y Clarkson; D Wilson; Mrs J Williams; N Williams; G Clements; F Gleaves; P Connolly; G Garrity; K Hitchen and Mrs C Giel.

Officers: N White, Scrutiny Support Officer; F McMorrow, Corporate Director Economic Prosperity and Sustainability ; G Ayling, Interim Head of Finance and Business Development; C Willoughby, Member Services Technical Support Officer; S Lewthwaite, Regeneration Project Officer.

EDE 15/07 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2007 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EDE 16/07 Post Office Closures

The Committee considered the Post Office proposals for the future of post offices in Copeland. These proposals formed part of the Post Office's Network Change Programme following measures announced by Government in May 2007, to change the overall size and shape of the network of Post Office branches in response to changes in the way services are delivered.

Of the 2,500 branch closures nationally, 35 are in Cumbria and 8 of which are in Copeland. These being the branches at Beckermat, Bigrigg, Gosforth, Holborn Hill, Lowca, Moor Row, Parton and Tangier Street, Whitehaven.

The proposal includes the introduction of service points (Outreaches) in certain locations to mitigate the impact of branch closures, but there are none planned for Copeland.

During discussion of this item, Members stressed the importance of working together and setting aside political beliefs and making a concerted effort to save all the Post Offices identified for closure within Copeland.

Members stressed the importance of Post Offices in Copeland as a meeting place for some sections of the community, and the many services they provide – including the payment of Council Tax bills. It was noted that as many of the identified Post Offices were in rural locations, alternative offices are not accessible due to the poor transport links.

It was suggested that a Special Meeting of this Committee could be arranged and witnesses be called in from the Post Office, the Post Offices identified for closure, Parish Councils and any other group/individual who could contribute to the formulation of Council's response to the consultation.

Members were advised that the deadline for responding to the Consultation Proposals was 27 May 2008.

RESOLVED – that

- a) the Post Office proposals for the future of Post Offices in Copeland be considered;
- b) a Special Meeting of this Committee be arranged and identification of witnesses for call-in be determined by the Committee Chairman and the Scrutiny Officer; and
- c) an update report be submitted to Full Council at the meeting on 15 April 2008.

EDE 17/07 Nuclear Opportunities Group

The Committee received a presentation from Rosie Mathisen, Nuclear Opportunities Director, West Lakes Renaissance, on the current position on Nuclear Investment Issues within Copeland, the effect this has on local employment and what progress has, and is, expected to be made on the nuclear issues within the Master Plan.

The Committee were advised that since the initial group meeting on 16 January 2008;

- a) the Group's Terms of Reference had been agreed;
- b) the Cumbria Economic Summit was due to be held on 9 April 2008, for public and private sector;
- c) the Prime Minister had been invited to launch "Britain's Energy Coast";

- d) branding and website for “Britain’s Energy Coast” was being developed;
- e) good progress has been made on the University; and
- f) National Skills Academy for Nuclear and the Nuclear Skills Academy North West.

Cumbria partners have been considering what would be the most appropriate regeneration delivery arrangements for the area with 30 key projects necessary for the delivery of the “Britain’s Energy Coast” agenda have been identified and agreed by the West Cumbria Partners.

The Committee thanked the Nuclear Opportunities Director for the presentation and invited them to return to a future meeting of this Committee to further update.

RESOLVED – that

- a) the presentation from the Nuclear Opportunities Group be received and considered; and
- b) the Nuclear Opportunities Director be invited to a future meeting of this Committee to provide a further update.

EDE 18/07 **Whitehaven Town Centre**

The Committee received a presentation from Gerard Richardson on behalf of the Whitehaven Chamber of Trade and Business Community on what they believe are the economic needs of Whitehaven Town Centre.

Concern was raised for the future of the Town Centre. It was felt that as Whitehaven has a relatively small shopping base, offering only small retail units it could be one of the most attractive. It was further felt that closer working should be encouraged between the Council and the local businesses.

It was noted that in the last 12 months, 47 town centre jobs had been lost.

It was felt that the traffic measures imposed by Capita along with the black tarmac repairs to stone streets were having a detrimental effect to the. Nor did vandalism and neglected shop fronts.

Members of the Committee were asked to consider the reestablishment of a Development Company to assist in the development of the town centre.

Further suggestions to regenerate the town consisted of a) of a Victorian style cover on King Street; b) the pedestrianisation of Lowther Street to the Harbour; c) a Festival Stand at the junction of King Street and Lowther Street; d) the possibility moving of some administration jobs from Sellafield to the Town Centre were also made; and e) free town centre parking, and extended shop opening hours and the transport infrastructure

Members of the Business community felt that there was a lot of mixed feelings with regard to a possible Town Council with Mayor.

The presentation was then open to a question and answer session.

Members of the Committee agreed that the town centre was 'shabby' and in need of urgent attention. The Corporate Director, Economic Prosperity and Sustainability, stated that a Regeneration Strategy Partnership Business Summit was planned for 22 May 2008 to which local businesses would be invited.

The Committee thanked the business community for their presentation.

RESOLVED – that the presentation from the Whitehaven Chamber of Trade and Business Community be received.

EDE 19/07 **Cumbria Tourism Strategy**

The Committee received a presentation from Cumbria Tourism on their draft '10 year Tourism Strategy for Cumbria – The Lake District'.

Members were advised that it had been 10 years since the last Cumbria Tourism Strategy document was compiled and today tourism was worth approximately £1.1 billion to the County, with approximately 8% going to Copeland.

It was noted that the area had recovered well after the foot and mouth outbreaks and the National Park had received approximately 15 million visitors per year. Market research has found scope for further growth, particularly outside of the National Park.

It was felt that new, good quality accommodation, including 4 star hotels which would attract coaches, was required, and improved rail services on the underused West Cumbria Coast line were highlighted as examples where work was needed.

The Lake District's proposal for World Heritage Site status could help the area and hill farmers in particular.

Cumbria Tourism stressed they were there to help and work with the Council.

During the debate, Members agreed that lack of transport was a major problem in West Cumbria. With the roads not being of a high standard, poor bus services and railway and it was noted that these were likely to get worse if there were further cuts in services.

Members were keen to establish a sea link to the Isle of Man on a regular basis, and the prospect of a link to Ireland should be investigated.

It was felt that to create a vibrant community it was important not to be over dependant on any one means of employment.

The West Cumbria Tourism Partnership needed to be re-invigorated with Copeland Borough Council, Allerdale Borough Council and Cumbria Tourism working to create a way forward.

RESOLVED – that a) the presentation from Cumbria Tourism be received; and

b) West Coast Tourism Partnership be invited to attend a future meeting of the committee.

EDE 20/07 **Work Plan**

The Committee considered its current work plan.

It was noted that the Task and Finish Group to review the enforcement of conditions attached to planning permissions was due to meet on 23 April 2008.

A special meeting was to be arranged to discuss Post Office closures

The Committee were advised that consultation letters are being issued to consultees to identify areas for the Committee to look at in the next municipal year, which will be added to the Work Plan.

RESOLVED – that the work plan be noted.

The Meeting Closed at 4:55pm

Chairman:.....

Date:.....