

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Report of the Chairman

COUNCILLOR CAROLE RUTHERFORD

The last meeting of the municipal year was a full and long one. Full as there were a number of 'final reports' to be discussed and agreed and long as the next meeting was not for another 11 weeks and issues needed to be resolved before then.

The Neighbourhood Working Task and Finish Group report was on the agenda. This work had initially been put forward by this Panel to look at the service delivery of area maintenance. However, because of the wider community aspects it had become a joint task and finish group with the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel. This had enabled the group to take a much broader look at the issues involved. Whilst the Panel were very supportive of the final recommendations they felt that here was a need for some additional work with a more specific environmental service focus. Consequently a further meeting of the Environment and Economy members of the task group was held on 11th April and three further recommendations were added to the report.

The Panel had also requested an update on the Executive's response to the recommendations of the Car Parking Task and Finish Group that had been submitted last year. The Executive had put on hold any action pending the outcome of the County Council's Parking Connect initiative. The Portfolio holder stated that whilst they were still awaiting a response from the county they had been able to move forward on some of the recommendations. Linear charging had been ruled out for the immediate future as the cost of new machines was prohibitive but they were still exploring the option of paying by phone and the introduction of pro rata contract parking. Initiatives to maximise the use of Devonshire car park were also being considered. Charging

for on street parking had been ruled out by the County council as the highways authority.

The Tourism report was as ever very positive and a pleasure to receive. As the minutes show this has been a very successful partnership with a long record of achievements with targets not only met but often greatly exceeded. The Panel were reassured to hear that with a committed and experienced team in place momentum will not be lost and further initiatives are being followed to ensure that Carlisle is an attractive visitor destination. We were however concerned about the reduction in government funding for tourism and it remains to be seen whether the proposed merger with the city centre into a new partnership will secure the necessary funding to continue the good work. In the meantime the Panel urged the Executive to ensure that funding for renovations at the old Town Hall Tourist Information centre is given a high priority when allocations are being made from the Capital Projects budget.

There has been a lot of media coverage of the Connect 2 cycleway project and following the portfolio holder's statement at the last council meeting, the panel requested clarification of the situation. A full report was presented to the panel and after further questions to both the portfolio holder and the officer, the panel were satisfied that the council for their part had done everything possible to ensure the scheme went ahead. The panel shared their concerns at the way that Sustrans had withdrawn funding and failed to give the council an adequate explanation. Furthermore we agreed that the council should write to the Lottery Commission giving them a full account of the situation.

Finally a further report on the Transformation process was received which gave information on the new structure and posts in the Economic Development directorate. There were some concerns that yet again we were having more redundancies but still advertising outside the authority to fill vacant posts

Carole Rutherford Chairman

April 14th 2011