
REPORT TO:	ENVIRONMENTAL & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	AGENDA ITEM:
DATE OF MEETING:	21 AUGUST 2003	CATEGORY: DELEGATED/
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	DAVID SOANES EXT 5714	DOC:
SUBJECT:	SELECT COMMITTEE ENQUIRY INTO REGENERATION OF COALFIELD COMMUNITIES	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	SWADLINCOTE & SOUTHERN PARISHES	TERMS OF REFERENCE: ES10

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members welcome this enquiry and respond to the select committee on the basis of the issues raised in this report, together with the comments made by the CCC.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise Members of the scope of the Select Committee enquiry and suggest the issues which Members may wish to mention in their response.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Select Committee has announced its' intention to carry out an enquiry into government policies to regenerate coalfield communities.
- 3.2 The brief of the inquiry is to look at:
- Policies to create employment opportunities
 - The reclamation and regeneration of sites
 - Links with health, welfare, education and other social issues
 - The roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved
 - Funding
- 3.3 The Coalfield Communities Campaign (CCC), of which the Council are members, will be submitting written evidence and may well be invited to appear in front of the Committee. They have suggested that the Council may wish to submit evidence itself, to provide the local perspective to the wider national picture. However, they

have also suggested that to achieve greater impact, the CCC and its members should say broadly similar things.

- 3.4 To date the CCC have not prepared a response. It is suggested that Members consider and comment on the issues of particular relevance to South Derbyshire and that these comments be incorporated into a response once the comments of CCC have been received.
- 3.5 The Coalfields Task Force Report 1998, was a study into the demise of coalfield communities during the 1980's and 1990's. It made recommendations geared to reducing unemployment, improving quality of life and standard of living of people in coalfield areas, and empowering communities. It was followed up by the Government's response, 'Making the Difference', which set out a number of measures to deal with the issues raised. These included:
- 3.6 Establishing the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, to support community initiatives, initially for 3 years, although this has since been extended. Because of its short lifespan, it has struggled to tackle some long term regeneration issues. What is required is a long term policy to ensure continuity of funding, including for project exit strategies.
- 3.7 There was a proposal to establish a Coalfields Enterprise Fund, offering loans for business start-ups and expansion. However, 5 years on this has still not emerged.
- 3.8 Historically, the Coalfields' share of lottery grants has been very low -only 60% of the national average. The Government has taken steps to improve this through the publication of a White Paper in July 2003. The outcomes of this need to be monitored to ensure that they are achieving the desired outcome.

Other issues which affect this area include:

- 3.9 Miners Pension Fund surpluses: (extract from CCC leaflet) - 'every year the Treasury takes more than £400 million out of the miners' pension funds - equivalent to nearly £1000 per scheme member. At the same time, many retired miners struggle to get by on low incomes. The Treasury's vast rake-off is the unintended result of a 1994 deal: in exchange for guaranteeing miners' pension entitlements, the Government takes 50% of any surpluses. The surpluses that have been generated have proved to be far bigger than anyone imagined possible.'

After years of pressure, the Government is finally proposing new ways of guaranteeing miners' pensions in future. In the long run this might put more cash in retired miners' pockets, but up to £3,500 million from previous surpluses - all sitting in the pension funds - is still due to be handed to the Treasury in installments over the next few years.

This situation is indefensible - financially, morally and politically. A comprehensive new settlement is needed:

- The Government should agree to take less of the historic surpluses, leaving more in the funds to boost pensioners' incomes
- The Government should in future be paid far less for providing its continuing but low-risk guarantee to pension entitlements

- More of what the Government does eventually receive should be ploughed back into coalfield communities.'

3.10 Miners Health Compensation - supporting CCC in its efforts to obtain appropriate compensation for the industrial injuries suffered by miners, including respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger.

3.11 Establishing a new generation of Enterprise Zones - the Council is already lobbying in respect of this matter.

3.12 Recognition that the jobs created since the demise of the collieries have predominantly been low wage/low skill.

3.13 The focus of regeneration efforts by Derbyshire County Council and emda on the coalfield areas of north Derbyshire and north Nottinghamshire, with little acknowledgement made of this area as a former coalfield.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Many of the Government's policies impact on the amount of external funding available to assist with regeneration policies in the former coalfield areas.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 No specific issues

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 Many of the initiatives and issues discussed impact on the former coalfield community.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 This enquiry is a welcome opportunity to review the government's policies to regenerate the former coalfield area.

8.0 Background Papers

Coalfield Task Force report 1998

'Making the Difference' - Government response to the report 1998

Various CCC papers

