

**At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bonallie, E. Gibson, Kelly, Padgett, Tye, Wakefield, L. Walton and A. Wright

**Also Present:-**

Councillor Tate - Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Wood

**Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2010**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**Sunderland 'the Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Progress Report**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress made on the Committee's Policy Review for 2010/11 into Sunderland 'the Place'.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised Members that the meeting with Sharon Hodgson MP had been rearranged for 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2011.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that she had attended the event at the Community Cohesion Building and had been impressed by the children from the city's schools and the technology that was available to them. Children from Broadway Junior School had attended the event to sing and members were told that Oxclose Community school had talked to students in Washington DC via a video link. The technology within the schools in Sunderland was better than that in the schools in Washington D.C. Within the Sunderland schools there was the technology available to carry out the video linking while the children in Washington D.C. had been required to go to a different building outside of the school to access the facilities. It was pleasing to see that the investment in technology had been so good.

Councillor Wakefield agreed that the children had been excellent and added that the whole event had been well put together.

The Chairman thanked the Members who had attended. It was pleasing to see such a large attendance at an event such as this. He expressed surprise that the technology within the city's schools was better than that at the schools in Washington D.C. This was proof that the investment in technology was obviously money well spent. Sunderland had excellent links with a number of large, important cities including Washington D.C. and Harbin in China which had a population of over 5 million people.

2. RESOLVED that the progress to date be received and noted.

### **Sunderland 'the Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Reputation and Influencing Programme**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of a presentation by the Director of Communications on the Reputation and Influencing Programme in the context of the Policy Review into Sunderland 'the Place'.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Deborah Lewin, Director of Communications, delivered the report and presentation and advised that the Reputation and Influencing Programme was a new project which was designed to work alongside the Economic Masterplan to support the future development of the city.

Within Sunderland there was a weaker private sector than within other areas of the country. Sunderland was not a well known city and there was a need to improve the perceptions of the city. Cities such as Nottingham which had a similar history to Sunderland had moved forward further than Sunderland in recent years.

Councillor Kelly commented that he had attended the Economic Masterplan launch event. He had been surprised by the lack of promotion of the city. He had concerns that the promotion of the city was being looked at again as the

previous projects should have been successful. The city was not good at promoting itself.

Ms Lewin advised that it was accepted that the city was not the most successful of cities; however it did have some successes. Nissan was an excellent example of a long term success story. Sunderland's strengths lay in assisting businesses to set up within the city while other cities were better at attracting business and being considered by businesses as they looked to invest.

Councillor A. Wright asked what effect success stories such as Nissan or Leibherr played in attracting other businesses to the area and raising the profile of the city.

Ms Lewin advised that Sunderland was classed as the premier automotive city in the UK. There was an 'ambassadors programme' however this was still in its infancy; the Committee could look at the development of this programme as a way of promoting the city.

Councillor Kelly commented that existing businesses such as Smiths Electric Vehicles and Nissan could be used as ambassadors for the city. Gateshead College had invested in a new facility at Nissan as a result of the new Battery Plant being developed at Nissan. He also commented that the city had excellent beach resorts and these should be publicised more.

Ms Lewin advised that the initial work was looking at what businesses looked at first when deciding whether to invest in an area. It was also important that the facilities the city offered to residents was publicised as there was a need to ensure that any relocated employees would want to live in the city.

The Chairman commented that the city had recovered well following the job losses in the 1970's and 1980's. There had however been a lack of publication of these successes. He queried whether the programme was getting enough support from business partners such as the chamber of commerce.

Ms Lewin stated that there had been workshops with businesses and organisations which were associated with business. At these workshops there had been issues identified and Ms Lewin agreed to provide these notes to Members. Ms Lewin invited the Chair to attend the next workshop on 27 January 2011 to participate.

The Chairman thanked Ms Lewin for her presentation and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the information be included in the Policy Review.

## **Sunderland ‘the Place’ Policy Review 2010/11: The Role of the Local Media**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to receive a presentation from Rob Lawson, the Editor of the Sunderland Echo, on the role of the Local Media in the context of the Committee’s Policy Review for 2010/11 into Sunderland ‘the Place’.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman welcomed Mr Lawson to the Meeting.

Mr Lawson by way of an introduction advised Members that he had been editor of the Sunderland Echo for the last 8 years and for the last 2 years he had also been the Editorial Director of Northeast Press. The Echo had first been published in 1873 and was a major employer within the city.

The Echo worked hard to maintain its position within the city and to provide what the residents wanted. There was an aim to have a balance between good and bad news.

The paper was politically neutral and aimed to provide full coverage of election campaigns. The paper was one of the few local newspapers which still had a Council Reporter. There was an aim to increase the coverage of Council Meetings within the Echo and it was intended that there would be an increased coverage of the Scrutiny Committees.

The majority of the people who work for the Echo were from Sunderland and it was felt that the Echo was an institution for the city in a similar way to the Empire Theatre or Sunderland AFC.

The Echo aimed to promote the good work done by young people in the city and held the Pride of Wearside awards and the Young Achievers awards to help promote this good work.

During the summer there had been a supplement giving information on things to do within Sunderland which had also been included in the South Shields and Hartlepool local newspapers. There was also advertising for Sunderland in the Leeds and Edinburgh local newspapers.

Councillor Tye commented on how pleasing it was to see young people portrayed so positively. He also commended the reporters on the sensitive way they dealt with issues; some of the national newspapers used underhand tactics to get stories.

Mr Lawson stated that it was important to ensure that the audience was not alienated. Following the Hillsborough disaster there had been a national newspaper had blamed the Liverpool supporters, this newspaper had never recovered its sales in the Liverpool area.

In response to a query from Councillor Tye regarding the Letters Page Mr Lawson advised that the Echo readership contributed a large number of letters; he felt that this was due to how close to its readership the paper was.

Councillor Kelly commented that Washington missed out on a lot of good news stories in the paper; the press had been sent invites to a large event in Washington however they had not attended. In Washington the Evening Chronicle was popular and he felt that there was a need for there to be a more local feel to the Echo for the Washington, Hetton and Houghton areas; the Washington Star also needed a more local feel to it as this covered Hetton and Houghton more than Washington. He understood the need for bad news to be given front page coverage however he felt that there needed to be more of a balance; there were a lot of young people who were doing good things in the city and there was a need to publicise this to ensure that there was a balance between good and bad news. The Echo needed to work to take sales away from the Chronicle.

Mr Lawson stated that there used to be five local editions of the Echo however now there was only one edition which meant that it was not possible to give as much coverage to individual areas as there previously was. He was concerned that such a large event had been missed and asked that if there are any future events that Councillors telephone to invite the paper and someone would attend to ensure that coverage was given. The Evening Chronicle had a strong following in Washington due to the amount of people from Washington who had originally moved from Tyneside and still felt that they were more a part of Tyneside than Sunderland. In Hetton and Houghton the Echo had a strong following.

Councillor A. Wright stated that raising the profile of the city was a concern. He had noticed that there were a number of promotions for weekend breaks for the East Coast Mainline services; he asked whether there would be any promotions for the Grand Central services which ran from Sunderland.

Mr Lawson replied that there was an excellent relationship between the Echo and Grand Central. Grand Central provided an excellent service and if they approached the Echo and asked for advertising promotions to be included in the paper then he would be happy to include them in the paper.

Councillor Wakefield commented that there seemed to have been an increase in the number of stories relating to Seaham and Dawdon, especially in the Police feature which seemed to cover Durham Constabulary more than Northumbria Police.

Mr Lawson advised that there was a need to provide coverage of the outlying areas such as Seaham and Whitburn; it would be easier to provide more localised coverage if there were more editions of the paper.

Councillor E. Gibson stated that it was pleasing to see that the Echo was working within schools; there was a need to strengthen the partnerships. The Echo was the local paper for the City and residents relied on it.

Mr Lawson advised that there were strong links with schools as there was a need for the Echo brand to be known in the schools.

Councillor Kelly then asked whether information was shared across the country to promote Sunderland in other areas.

Mr Lawson advised that the Concerts were a major selling point for the city. Editors of other local newspapers had been asking how they could get tickets. People from outside of the city did not know about the attractions the city had such as the beach. The city had a problem with its image, however once people had come to the city their attitude changed.

Councillor Kelly then queried whether there was any potential for advertising Grand Central outside of the city as a way of bringing people into the city.

Mr Lawson stated that this was something that could be looked at; Johnson Press, the publisher who owned North East Press, had newspapers in cities along the train line.

Councillor A. Wright commented that he felt the Echo advertised the Evening Economy and the music scene well; bands were important as they attracted people to the pubs and nightclubs.

The Chairman asked Mr Lawson whether there was anything in his opinion that needed to be focused on and what the Council did well or needed to improve.

Mr Lawson stated that the Council had an excellent press office. Residents felt that the Council did the basics well however lacked in ambition. In his personal opinion the Council had the right attitude towards the Vaux site; in the past the Council would have taken a 'that will do' approach which would have lead to a lower quality development on the site, once the development of the site has taken place the interim period will be forgotten.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lawson for attending the meeting and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information provided be given consideration as part of the Policy Review into Sunderland 'the Place'

### **Sunderland 'the Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Putting Sunderland on the Weather Map**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the interim response received from Jennifer Bartram, Assistant Producer, BBC Weather Centre.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer, advised Members of the interim response which had been received and stated that it was expected that a formal written response would be received from the BBC and this would be circulated to Members.

The Chairman advised that he had spoken to the BBC after the Email response had been received and they had explained to him how the weather maps were designed. When asked why Newcastle appeared on more maps than Sunderland they had been unaware that Sunderland was the larger city. As the designers of the maps were based in London they had very little knowledge of the North-East.

5. RESOLVED that the response from the BBC be noted and included in the Policy Review for 2010/11.

### **Sunderland City Council Local Development Framework: Annual Monitoring Report 2009/10**

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report for 2009/10.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Cole, Planning Policy Manager, presented the report and advised Members that all of the targets had been met. There had been fewer new houses completed than in previous years however given that there had been fewer dwellings lost, either through demolition or conversion to other uses, there had been the largest increase in the number of new homes since 1999/2000. There had been a significant loss of business floor space; there had been 22,500m<sup>2</sup> of new floor space built however there had been a loss of 60,500m<sup>2</sup> of floor space through demolition or change of use. There had been a total of 9.8MW of renewable energy capacity installed; this took the total for the city up to 17.2MW which was a significant contribution towards the 22MW target for Tyne and Wear.

Councillor Wakefield commented on the Coalfield name which had been used for the Hetton and Houghton area; this was the greenest area of the city and as the postal address for the area was Houghton-Le-Spring he felt that this would be a more appropriate way to refer to the area. He queried where the name Coalfield had come from.

Mr Cole advised that Coalfield had been used in this report as it corresponded with the name given to the Area Regeneration Framework for the area. It would be possible to give consideration to using a different name in the future.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment added that the Coalfield name had been agreed by Councillors.

Councillor Wakefield then asked how much electricity was actually being produced from renewable sources. He was aware that during the bad weather the wind turbines were only operating at 2 percent of their capacity.

Mr Cole advised that the wind turbines electricity production was dependant on the weather and that the installed capacity was the standard measurement which was used nationally.

The Chairman thanked Mr Cole for his report and it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the Annual Monitoring Report be received and noted.

### **Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 January 2011 – 30 April 2011**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 January 2011 – 30 April 2011 which related to the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer, presented the Forward Plan.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Lancaster for her report it was:

7. RESOLVED that the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

### **Work Programme 2010-11**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2010-11 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Helen Lancaster, Acting Scrutiny Officer, presented the work programme.

8. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) G. MILLER,  
Chairman.