

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors M. Dixon, Essl, Foster, Maddison, I. Richardson, Rolph and A. Wilson.

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate - Chairman of Management Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Trueman - Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Errington, Kay and McClennan.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 15th June, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th June, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 8 – Empire Theatre Annual Report

Councillors S. Watson and Tate declared personal interests in the item as Council appointed Members of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Response from Cabinet – 24th June, 2010 – Policy Review – Access to Housing

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 24th June, 2010 where consideration was given to the Committees policy review into Access to Housing in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that Cabinet had approved the recommendations from the review in their entirety and the Committee's attention was drawn to Appendix A which provided an action plan in respect of each recommendation.

Councillor Trueman, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities, presented the feedback in relation to the Action Plan and in relation to Recommendation 8 urged Members that if they received a query from a constituent regarding homelessness they should be directed to contact Mr. Caddick's team as soon as possible. It was essential in trying to reduce the risk of homelessness that any problem was addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, together with Peter Smith, Housing Advice Manager, were present to address any comments or questions from Members. In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Caddick advised that following the change of Government there had been no contra-indications regarding the future of Choice Based Lettings. He believed the system was all about ensuring what was best for the customer and that it was something that the Council should be doing in any case. If the legislation changed, he felt the Council would still need to have some form of customer focused approach. With regard to a further enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Smith advised that the issue could become the subject of an e-consultation. Initial consultations had been extremely positive and the second round of consultations with regard to specific issues was about to commence. The service had been working closely with Gentoo in this regard.

Councillor Maddison referred to the 'progress commentary' in respect of Recommendation 1 and asked for clarification of the term 'IT issues'. Mr. Smith replied that this referred to negotiations with the supplier to ensure that the system would be able to adapt to the development of the sub regional CBL scheme and that the Council would not have to pay again for any modifications.

The Chairman having thanked Councillor Trueman, Mr. Smith and Mr. Caddick for their attendance it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the actions contained within the Action Plan as detailed in Appendix A to the report be received and noted.

Performance Report 2009/2010

The Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Executive Director of City Services, Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a performance update relating to services within the purview of the Committee for the period April 2009 to March 2010, namely Housing, Culture, Sustainability and Community Cohesion.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Gillian Robinson, Corporate Performance Monitoring Manager, presented the report which provided:-

- i) relevant extracts from the Council's annual report;
- ii) an overview of consultation exercises undertaken during the period;
- iii) progress in relation to the LAA targets and other national indicators.

With regard to Housing, Members were advised that homelessness was reducing. Housing advice had prevented 714 homeless cases during 2009/2010, an improvement on the previous year when 684 cases were prevented – 9 households were living in temporary accommodation at the end of 2009/2010 compared to 10 households the previous year.

Despite the economic downturn and the detrimental effect on the housing market, 384 additional homes were provided during 2009/2010, this was an improvement on the previous year when 299 additional homes were provided – 191 affordable homes were provided during 2009/2010 compared with 230 the previous year.

Performance against NI 159 'Supply of ready to develop housing sites' had exceeded the target of 100%. The supply of ready to develop housing sites had reduced when compared to the previous year as a consequence of the economic climate and targets for 2009/10 were set to anticipate this.

Fuel poverty was reducing, only 4.14% of households claiming income based benefits were living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating improving from 4.7 in 2008/09 – 38.8% of these households had high energy efficiency ratings (compared to 33.7% in 2008/09).

The number of housing prevention cases (715) exceeded its target of 695 cases for 2009/10, which provided evidence that the Council implemented a more pro-active preventative strategy. The number of private sector dwellings that had been either demolished or returned to use by the Council decreased from 387 to 332 between 2008/09 and 2009/10. The 2009/10 target was therefore not achieved but the number of such dwellings demolished/returned to use increased to 115 for the period April – June 2010, on course to meet the 2010/11 target.

With regard to Culture, visits to museums had increased to 1527 per 1000 population compared to 1437 per 1000 the previous year – 54% of respondents stated that had used museums/galleries within the last year, with 54% also stating that they had used theatres/concert halls. Satisfaction amongst service users with all facilities was high with 71% satisfied with museums/galleries and 72% satisfied with theatres/concert halls.

With regard to Sustainability Performance Indicators, the percentage CO₂ reduction from LA operations against a set baseline (2008/09 emissions) (NI 185) was an increase of 0.18% which had improved from an increase of 4.00% the previous year. Through the Carbon Plan, the Council was aiming to reduce its carbon emissions by 10% by 2012, based on the 2006/07 baseline year. After the first 3 years, the Council's carbon emissions had shown an increase of 3%. The main increase had come from the electricity consumption in buildings. However, since the baseline

year, major new buildings have been built, buildings have joined the energy contract and changes in the use of buildings have led to this increase.

To further help reduce the Council's energy consumption, Automatic Meter Reading was being installed to better monitor energy consumption. The Energy Conservation Team were currently developing energy reduction targets for individual buildings and developing a Carbon Policy that would help influence the building specific reduction targets.

As a measure of community cohesion all residents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that their local area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together. 65% of respondents agreed that their local area was a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. This compared to 67% recorded in 2008. The remaining 35% gave the opposing view.

When considering respect and consideration in their local area, 40% of respondents perceived people not treating one another with respect and consideration to be a problem in their area. This included 12% who felt this was a very big problem. Three fifths (60%) of respondents felt that this was not a problem. There had been very little movement over time on this issue when comparing the results with the 2008 survey (39%). The percentage of people who felt that they could influence decisions was improving from 26.3% to 27.4%.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Craddock advised that developers were in general banking land rather than bringing it to the market. The Council's Local Investment Plan would look to bring forward focused sites for development linked to the Economic Masterplan. There would, however, need to be a churn in the housing market.

Councillor Rolph asked if the Council would be prepared to look at the self build option. Mr. Caddick advised that the service would not be closed to anything however it would depend on developers coming forward with ideas. There was currently a need to think more creatively.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Ms. Robinson advised that she would provide her with information in respect of the Community Cohesion work undertaken in the Coalfields area.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Dixon, Mr. Caddick advised that he was developing a hostel strategy which he would bring before the Committee in due course. He was conscious of the number of businesses based in Sunnyside which housed a number of vulnerable people. The service was looking at a variety of different options to try and stop referrals to the accommodation and were also talking to the business owners in respect of their safeguarding responsibilities. He advised that as they were classed as houses in multiple occupation, they should be licensed and therefore subject to inspection. Inspections were due to start soon.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor I. Richardson, Mr. Caddick advised that he would provide him with the figures for the number of private rented properties in the City and the number of landlords in the Private Landlords Accreditation Scheme.

Councillor Maddison referred to the hostel strategy and asked if it would make provision for the 16 to 18 year old age group. Mr. Caddick advised that it would not as that age group was covered by different legislation with regard to safeguarding and looked after children.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Robinson, Mr. Caddick, Mr. Smith and Councillor Trueman for their attendance, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the continued good progress made by the Council and the Sunderland Partnership and those areas requiring further development to ensure that performance is actively managed, be noted.

Role of Culture in Supporting Sustainable Communities – Policy Review 2010/11: Scoping and Baseline Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out the remit, scope and background to the Committee's forthcoming policy review into the role of Culture in supporting Sustainable Communities.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

In response to an enquiry from Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, Members confirmed that they were happy with the terms of reference as set out in the report. In addition Councillor Rolph advised that the Coalfield Area Committee had a Task and Finish Group looking into Heritage in the Coalfield from which support could be drawn. With regard to potential areas of enquiry she suggested Tourism and Culture bodies in the City together with National Bodies and Specialist Heritage Bodies.

Members were advised that if they wished to sit on any of the Task and Finish Groups, expressions of interest should be submitted to Mr. Diamond or Ms. Lancaster. Councillor Rolph stated that meetings of Task and Finish Groups tended to be held during the day which was often inconvenient for many Members. Ms. Hall advised that she would have no problems if meetings were arranged for the evenings.

The Chairman having advised that the first evidence gathering report would be submitted to the next meeting, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that approval be given to the remit, scope and terms of reference of the Policy Review as detailed in the report.

Extra Care Accommodation – Management Guide

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which appended a copy of the Extra Care Accommodation – Management Guide which outlined:-

- i) good practice relating to developing a scheme, project management arrangements, information for providers and information required for residents;
- ii) the Council's aspirations relating to the management standards expected within future extra care housing developments;
- iii) the Council's expectations relating to the programme management and subsequent operational management of an extra care scheme, with the main focus being upon positive customer outcomes.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, presented the report and addressed comments and questions from Members. Councillor Foster offered his congratulations to Mr. Caddick and his team on what he believed was an excellent guide, particularly in relation to its clarity.

Councillor Rolph asked how often the Guide would be reviewed. She referred to paragraphs 2.2/2.3 and the references to the Enduring Power of Attorney which she advised had now been replaced by the Lasting Power of Attorney. Mr. Caddick confirmed that the Guide would be reviewed every 6 months and that any significant changes would be brought before the Committee.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Caddick advised that the Guide was about ensuring a mixed community approach and there would be no two tier service structure. Services would be the same, with the same outcomes whether premises were bought or rented. Mr. Caddick advised that he wanted the developments to be seen as homes for life able to accommodate the care needs of people across the whole spectrum, especially as people became more frail.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Dixon, Mr. Caddick confirmed that the properties would be subject to a service charge.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 3.3 regarding Office Accommodation and asked how the Council would respond if a developer indicated that it was not interested in providing the accommodation. Mr. Caddick replied it was not optional. The Council required a consistent approach and wouldn't accept second best. Developers would be told what the Council would expect.

Members having welcomed the Guide, the Chairman thanked Mr. Caddick for his attendance and it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Empire Theatre Annual Report

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members of the work ongoing within the Sunderland Empire Theatre,

together with the monitoring systems currently in place to ensure the highest quality of service was achieved within the Theatre.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jane Hall, Head of Culture and Tourism, together with Andrew Rawlinson, Theatre General Manager, presented the report and addressed comments and questions from Members.

Ms. Hall referred to Appendix II and advised that a number of the capacity figures were incorrect. She would ensure that a revised schedule was emailed to Members.

Ms. Hall and Mr. Rawlinson, having addressed questions in relation to:-

- outreach work with disadvantaged groups;
- stage craft qualifications;
- the Theatre's remit to provide a balanced programme ranging from large scale popular shows to those without a wide appeal;
- a desire to see visits from the RSC Touring Group;
- the dearth of shows for children over the summer period

it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

World Heritage Status

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the progress of the Wearmouth-Jarrow partnership in its pursuit of World Heritage Status for the twin Anglo Saxon Monastery prior to the submission of the Nomination File to the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

To compliment the report, Michael King, Project Manager, provided the Committee with a comprehensive Powerpoint presentation which:-

- highlight what World Heritage Status was and its significance;
- what marked Wearmouth-Jarrow out as World Class;
- the key components of the nomination;
- how work was progressing on the ground in support of the nomination.

Councillor I. Richardson applauded the work undertaken by Ms. Hall, Mr. King and their team. He stated that it was a wonderful project, especially with regard to the legacy it would provide. He wished the team all the luck in the world with their bid.

Councillor Rolph stated that it was essential that the sites were enhanced with depiction and interpretation boards as there was currently nothing of this kind at St. Peter's. This would also tie in with the legible City project. She also pointed out

that the links with other Anglo Saxon sites in the City, such as those in Houghton, should be promoted. It was also disappointing that the sites, if they were so unique, did not feature in the recent 'How to read a Church' television programme.

7. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st September – 31st December, 2010

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 1st September – 31st December, 2010 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Rolph welcomed that Mr. Caddick had agreed to bring the Local Investment Plan to the Committee but noted that according to the Forward Plan it was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 6th October, which was prior to the date of the next Committee.

8. 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).

9. RESOLVED that the Committee's Work Programme for 2010-11 be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.