

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 20th SEPTEMBER, 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ball and Tye.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 12th July, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 12th July, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – Response to the 09/10 Policy Reviews

In accordance with Part 5 – [Part 2, Paragraph 11(b)] of the Council's Constitution, Councillor Blackburn declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the item as a Member of the Cabinet and left the meeting having addressed questions from Members of the Committee in respect of their presentation and prior to any deliberation.

Variation in the Order of Business

At this juncture, the Chairman proposed and it was agreed to vary the order of business to consider item 8 and 9 at item 5 and 6 respectively on the agenda to allow the external representatives to leave after their items had been considered.

2. RESOLVED that the order of business be varied accordingly

Response to the 09/10 Policy Reviews

(a) Introduction of 20mph Zones in Sunderland

(b) Allotment Provision in Sunderland

The Executive Director of City Services and the Portfolio Holder for Attractive and Inclusive City submitted a report (copies circulated) to provide feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 21 July 2010, which considered the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee's Policy Review into the introduction of 20mph zones in Sunderland and to provide feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 21 July 2010, which considered the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee's Policy Review into allotment provision in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

a) Introduction of 20mph Zones in Sunderland

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 Blackburn, Portfolio Holder for Attractive and Inclusive City, presented the feedback in relation to the Action Plan.

Les Clarke, Head of Street Scene was present to address any comments or questions from Members.

Councillor E. Gibson expressed her disappointment that Northumbria Safer Roads Initiative was unable to commit to enforcing 20 mph speed limits due to funding cuts. Councillor Blackburn stated that the Council were committed to the recommendation and hopefully the situation could be reviewed once the funding situation was clearer.

Councillor Wood stated that if areas were designed to be 20 mph zones then this limit should be self enforcing.

Referring to recommendation 3, Councillor Wood advised that he was disappointed that the costs were so high to implement the 15 pilot areas. He stated that North Tyneside had been quoted much smaller figures.

Councillor Blackburn advised that although Sunderland and North Tyneside had similar on-street values, the road layouts were very different. The Chairman stated that the Sunderland scheme tended to consider zones with as many as 54 streets (Silksworth) whereas in North Tyneside they tended to be one street projects.

Councillor Wright stated that it was encouraging that new housing estates would be likely to have 20 mph zones and he enquired whether the low cost schemes could start to be progressed.

The Chairman advised that the Committee had agreed to follow the recommendations from Jacobs Consultancy who proposed that the schemes be prioritised in terms of those most in need of work not cost.

Councillor Kelly stated that if there was still capacity in the Area Committee budgets then there might be an option for them to fund pieces of work on this issue.

Mr. Odunaiya advised that in real terms the council was trying to establish the bigger picture with regard to priorities. Hopefully this would be revealed in the budget consultation process.

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

b) Allotment Provision in Sunderland

Councillor Blackburn presented the feedback in relation to the Action Plan.

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

Progress on the Tyne and Wear Accessible Bus Network Design Strategy

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with a progress report regarding the Tyne and Wear Accessible Bus Network Design Strategy.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman welcomed Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General and Mr Tobyn Hughes, Nexus Director of Strategy and invited them to provide a progress report on the Accessible Bus Network Design Strategy.

Councillor A. Wright felt that the figure of 218 completed questionnaires was a small number and he enquired whether the 768 people who had viewed the proposals were in addition to the number who had completed questionnaires.

Mr Hughes advised that hundreds of questionnaires had been distributed and similar exercises in other districts had provided similar results. The consultation exercise had been extensive, including public events throughout the city, adverts in the Sunderland Echo and Sunrise and promotion through Sun FM. Mr Hughes purported that the localised nature of the consultation whereby proposals might only be affecting a small area within a community meant that few people respond via questionnaire.

The Chairman felt that engagement with the public could have been improved by positioning people 'on the ground' with clipboards in metro stations and inviting people to share their opinions.

Councillor Wakefield commented that people did not understand the difference between commercial and public networks. Better responses to the consultation would probably have been received if people were made aware of this.

Councillor Wood stated that the overall proposals were good and did meet the problems and issues raised. However delivery depended on resources. Councillor Wood queried whether there was a secured budget and if Nexus were prepared to put money into a supporting budget.

Mr Hughes advised that discussions on the issue had recently taken place through the Integrated Transport Authority and information would be provided to the District Leaders. There had been plans to originally deliver the revised accessible network by utilising existing resources in a more intelligent way (by recasting).

Currently all public bodies were reviewing resources; Nexus received its funding from a variety of sources. The Metro was funded via central government grants, local authority levy and the fare box recovery ratio. If the Metro was removed from the equation, the Nexus budget this year would be just over £100 million with £48 million allocated to concessionary travel, £42 million of this being allocated to the statutory reimbursement of older and disabled passengers. Therefore the budget was very limited. Further guidance was awaited regarding funding that will be available to all public bodies and the amount of discretionary spend was therefore also restricted.

The Chairman queried how the remaining £52 million was allocated and was advised that this was utilised on the Tyne Ferry, bus information, pension contributions and signage.

Mr Hughes advised that a net figure of £8 million pounds was made available for secured bus services but this figure was now under pressure.

The Chairman enquired what Nexus would be doing to mitigate this and what could be done to help local authorities. He questioned whether the Accessible Network scheme was now deliverable.

Mr Garner advised that the ITA proposals would be made known in January. In preparation for this, Nexus were proposing a number of budget scenarios with efficiency measures identified. Provided enough information was gathered by the end of the year, Mr Hughes was confident that the revised network could be delivered and all legal requirements met.

The Chairman looked forward to the outcome of the Leaders Group discussions.

Having thanks Messrs Hughes and Garner for their report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the progress of the Tyne and Wear Accessible Bus Network Design Strategy be received and noted.

CE Electric: Update on Targets for repairs to Street Lighting

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with information regarding targets for fault repairs, undertaken by CE Electric, to the city's street lighting stock.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Graham Carr, Highways Maintenance Manager gave a brief overview of the report before introducing Brian Atkinson, Repairs Manager, Geoff Earl, Head of Connections Delivery and Derek Fairbairn, Connections Manager, CE Electric UK who provided a power point presentation to brief committee members on NEDL's current performance in relation to street lighting connections and repairs and customer service improvements via the introduction of the new unmetered guaranteed standards.

Councillor Gibson commended the work of the repair team and advised that Doxford was a large regeneration area which had experienced problems with underground cables when demolition work was carried out. The repairs had been carried out as soon as possible and on behalf of local residents she thanked the team for its efforts.

Councillor Wood advised that he was astonished that the target was 35 working days for repairs and stated that this could amount to nearly two months.

Mr Earl advised that the 35 day target was a national standard and was certainly not what the company worked to. The statistics show that performance was very good and most work was carried out much sooner than 35 days.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the graphs showed that performance went down during the summer months which were puzzling as he assumed incidents would be greater in the winter. Mr Atkinson advised that June and July had been very wet and consequently had affected lighting. Faults would often appear a number of weeks after a down pour. June and July was also a peak time for staff taking annual leave. However, in general, Mr Atkinson did not feel there was a winter/ summer divide. An average of 20 working days was still achieved.

The Chairman stated that the direction of travel was excellent and thanked Messrs Atkinson, Earl and Fairbairn for the report. Accordingly it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the contents of the presentation be received and noted.

Sunderland 'The Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Scene Setting Report

The Chief Executive and Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide a background and overview to the Scrutiny Committee in relation to the policy review into Sunderland 'the Place'.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jane Peverley, Communications Manager and Chris Alexander, Head of Culture and Tourism were in attendance to present the report and provided a PowerPoint presentation which detailed the terms of reference for the Policy Review, visitor impact in Sunderland, perceptions of Sunderland as a place and the supporting key policies and governance arrangements that contribute to the issue.

Councillor E. Gibson reiterated previous concerns regarding the lack of hotels in the City. Although the city had been host to a number of high profile music events and brought west end shows to the Sunderland Empire, visitors who were planning an over night stay would have to travel out of the city.

Councillor Kelly felt that Sunderland 'The Place' tended to focus on 'The City' and did not take into account the individual identities of Washington or Hetton and Houghton. There were some excellent facilities and attractions outside of the main city area such as Washington Old Hall and Herrington Country Park which were not utilized to their full potential.

Mr Alexander fully appreciated the comments made by Councillor Kelly and understood that people needed to understand their own sense of place. This was borne out when people were asked where they were from; some identified themselves with a city, others very much identified themselves with an area within the city.

Councillor Wakefield also felt it was very important to acknowledge that the city was made up of component parts. Houghton was one of the oldest residential areas in the region and its unique identity must be preserved.

The Chairman agreed that it was extremely important to gain a strong sense of place within a locality while recognising that it is part of the city. The component parts needed to gel because working together would enhance the brand.

The Chairman referred to the figures that had been circulated at the meeting detailing tourism figures 2003-2009 in comparison with Newcastle and Gateshead. He directed Members' attention to the percentage increase which revealed in relative terms that visitor numbers to Sunderland were higher than

Newcastle and Gateshead. These figures would be drilled down in more detail and the Chairman looked forward to receiving this data.

Councillor Kelly advised that the economic down turn would have a positive impact on local British tourism. It was important that this was taken advantage of in all areas in Sunderland.

The Chairman then proposed that all Members be invited to take part in two task and finish groups to specifically focus on the following two separate pieces of work:

- Sunderland Football Club – the club has a major impact on the identity of the City and its impact on tourism could be investigated. How could Stadium Village be further utilised?
- Sunderland University – as an innovative, forward-thinking university with high standards of teaching and research how could it further support the Place agenda and encourage qualified graduates to remain in Sunderland.

Councillor Kelly felt that both pieces of work focused on the city centre and advised that he would like a task and finish group to look at the separate identities of the four areas of the city.

Following discussion on the issues it was,

7. RESOLVED that:

- i) the contents of the report be received and noted;
- ii) a task and finish group is established to look at the sense of Place within the areas of the city to be chaired by Councillor Kelly; and
- iii) a task and finish group is established to consider how the city's institutions can contribute to Sunderland the Place to be Chaired by Councillor E. Gibson.

Legible City Project Update

Report of the Executive Director of City Services (copy circulated) to provide details the background to Sunderland's Legible City project and provides information on the current position.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Chris Alexander presented the report and referred Members to the appendices attached to the report which detailed answers to questions regarding legible city, the expected benefits, 10 key principles and a city centre walking map.

The Chairman having thanked Mr Alexander for his report it was:-

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

Performance Report April 2009 – March 2010

The Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Environment and Attractive Scrutiny Committee with a performance update relating to the period April 2009 to March 2010. The report included key achievements during 2009/10, residents' satisfaction with services and progress in relation to the LAA targets and other national indicators.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mike Lowe, Assistant Head of Performance Improvement was in attendance to present the report.

Referring to the Transport and Road Safety statistics, Councillor Wood welcomed the reduction in congestion.

Councillor Wood stated that the reduction in the percentage of households within 30 minutes of the closest A & E hospital was concerning. Mr Lowe agreed to find out more details as to why the figure had reduced and advised that it could be down to the cut in bus services.

Councillor Wood questioned whether the 2009/10 outturn figure for the total number of local bus passenger journeys originating in the authority area was correct. Mr Lowe advised that the comma may be in the wrong place and he agreed to find out.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that it was concerning that the target of 13.60% for the number of children killed or seriously injured had not been achieved.

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

Centre for Public Scrutiny 8th Annual Conference - Feedback

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with verbal feedback from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) 8th Annual Conference that was held on 30 June and 1 July 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor A. Wright had attended the conference and provided a verbal feedback of the two day event.

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

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 September 2010 – 31 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 1 September 2010 – 31 December 2010 which relate to the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

Ms Sarah Abernethy, Assistant Scrutiny Officer presented the report.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

11. 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.

Ms Sarah Abernethy, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised that the Ryhope Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy scheduled for the October meeting would now be considered in November.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

12. 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.