

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on TUESDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2023 at 4.30 p.m.

Present: -

Councillor Burrell in the Chair

Councillors, Dixon, Fagan, Leonard and Scanlan.

Also in attendance: -

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Neil Guthrie, Development Director, Sunderland City Council

Mr Anthony Crabb, Project Director, Sunderland City Council

Councillor Kevin Johnston, Portfolio Holder for Dynamic City

Mr Marc Morley, Director of Environmental Services, Sunderland City Council

Members of the Press

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Foster, Johnston and Watson

Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Committee held on 7th November, 2023

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 7th November 2023 were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 7th November 2023 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Regeneration of City – Progress Report

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) to advise on the progress being made in delivering the regeneration of a number of key sites within the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Guthrie, Development Director and Anthony Crabb, Project Director were in attendance along with the Portfolio Holder for Dynamic City, Cllr Kevin Johnston to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation.

Councillor Fagan commented that there was a great deal going on and she hoped that it would all pan out. In relation to the housing proposals in the Sheepfolds Councillor Fagan enquired as to the percentages that would be to rent or privately owned etc.

Mr Guthrie advised that the properties owned by the Council would predominantly be for private rent and were seen as a catalyst for attracting investment. The Homes of 2030, they would look to sell as these would be bespoke properties.

The Farringdon Row development provided by Place First was a private development and the private developments on Sheepfolds would be expected to be a mix for open market sale, private rented and some affordable housing as they were trying to increase the housing choice but they would be driven by the market on his.

Councillor Fagan referred to rumours that the vacant Cinema site was to be converted to student accommodation and queried if they were focussed on keeping the site as a Cinema. Mr Guthrie advised that they were in dialogue with 3 to 4 operators to keep the building as a Cinema and there were viable offers on the table but the existing contract and lease needed to be seen through to termination and it was hoped that some announcement could be made next year on this.

In terms of student accommodation they were looking at opportunities along the northern side of the High Street as the University has a demand for high quality student accommodation and Sunnyside would be one of the areas they looked at.

In response to Councillor Dixon's query over Sunnyside and if Towns had their interest extended, Mr Guthrie informed that Towns were still within their original remit at the moment with the Pilot being one of the more strategic ones so they were keen to retain Towns moving forward as the service they had offered had been welcomed by the community there. They were currently talking with the government about extending the Place Strategy and retaining Towns as part of that.

With regard to the query over the former Joplings building, Mr Guthrie advised that since acquiring the building, it was not in the best shape, it was 100 percent let as student accommodation at the moment and works had been required to bring it up to standard. Feasibility studies were being looked at.

In response to Councillor Dixons query over links with the University with regards to overseas students, Mr Guthrie informed that they had seen a shift in demand in types of accommodation/apartments and an increase in students so they were talking to the University about interventions. The Sheepfolds site had the opportunity for apartment blocks and they were in dialogue with the University and the Health bodies over this.

In relation to a query over Officers relationship with Homes England, Mr Guthrie advised that Lead Officers from Homes England were regionalised so they did have a good relationship with the officer and that they were one of the priority areas for investment so they were working hard in the background towards long term strategic

investment projects. Councillor K. Johnston also advised of a recent event held within City Hall which had been attended by Homes England and they had been impressed by what was on offer.

Councillor Dixon enquired as to Gentoo's withdrawal from the Vistry partnership at the old Civic Centre site. Mr Guthrie commented that he didn't know the details as they were both private companies but they were not immune to the same pressures in terms of rising costs that everyone faced.

Councillor Dixon referred to High Street West and the possible need for CPO's. Mr Crabb advised that they owned most of the buildings so it would only be the odd building that may require a CPO, they were confident those issues could be resolved but they would need the process in place to fall back on.

The Chairman introduced Councillor K, Johnston to address the Committee on his portfolio and he added that the presentation showed that this was one of the most ambitious regeneration projects in the Country and it was a fantastic time for everyone in the City to be involved in it and it was helping to encourage businesses to become involved along the way.

Councillor Dixon commented that it seemed people were working together well in terms of all the different agencies involved. Mr Guthrie commented that they had a clear vision that they were sticking to and delivering against their plan which gave the Government confidence to invest in.

Councillor Johnston also wished to praise the Business Investment Team who were doing excellent work in attracting businesses, which was all having a knock-on effect.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked the Officers and Councillor Johnston for their attendance. it was then:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Events in the City - Update

The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to update on events held in the City during the year and future plans

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman informed the Committee that this item was to be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee as its contents were closely tied to the Sunderland BID/Chamber of Commerce item scheduled and it was felt best that they be considered together.

3. RESOLVED that the report be deferred to the next meeting

Environmental Services - Update

The Director of Environmental Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing an update on a range of environmental issues affecting the City and the plans for the future.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Marc Morley, Director of Environmental Services was in attendance to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation (copy circulated)

Councillor Scanlan referred to the Hendon Project commenting that this had worked really well and had drastically improved the situation in that area and wished to thank the team for this. Mr Morley advised that it was about sustaining this moving forward and they also had Back on the Map involved now.

Councillor Dixon commented that the staff, especially those covering the East area, city centre side and within the Ward were excellent and always gave a swift response and he couldn't speak highly enough of. Mr Morley thanked Councillor Dixon for his comments and advised that he would pass on his compliments to the team.

Councillor Dixon referred to a recent request that the Area Committee wished to fund grit bins within the community but had not been allowed due to Council criteria and commented that he found this a little disappointing and wondered if this could be revisited. Mr Morley advised that the Council had adopted a formal grit bin policy which they had to follow and if an incident occurred the Council could be held liable and be left open to challenge. Also if staff were filling the grit bins then they weren't out on the roads when needed but he would certainly speak with Councillor Dixon outside of the meeting to ascertain further details on the proposal.

Councillor Fagan referred to the presentation and the digitisation of service areas, commenting that this was great to see internally but felt that it was excluding those members of the public that weren't digitally savvy and caused issues when booking slots for the tip, parking services etc so we needed to be mindful that there was a section of the population who couldn't use digital services otherwise we would be leaving those isolated.

Mr Morley advised that both of those examples could be booked or accessed over the phone also. In response to Councillor Fagan advising that she was aware there had been some resistance from staff doing this when contacted over the phone, Mr Morley advised that he would feed this back to the Customer Network.

Councillor Fagan referred to the Cemetery Improvement Board and its Policy changes commenting that it would be good if communications could be circulated to all Members rather than just those Members that had cemeteries within their ward as whilst Members may not have a one within their ward, they would have constituents that have to use the cemetery. Mr Morley confirmed that he would speak with the Officer involved on this.

Councillor Fagan also wished to compliment the Waste Recycling Manager for their work when contacted.

Councillor Leonard referred to the statistic that side waste was down and queried if this had resulted in fly tipping figures going up and if recycling figures had increased. Mr Morley informed that they were still collecting data which they would not know until June next year therefore he wouldn't like to comment on just six months of data as yet but in terms of fly tipping, from the figures available there had been no rise.

In response to Councillor Leonards query over garden waste, when it runs from and if this could be extended due to the milder weather. Mr Morley advised that this ran from beginning of April to the second week of November (17 collections) and unfortunately couldn't extend this as this would require extra drivers and figures showed the tonnages did drop off nearer November with the colder weather so they did not have the resources at present for this.

The Chairman commented that there had been residents raising the point that there was falling leaves in November to be disposed of. Mr Morley informed that there were two collections within November to account for this, these collections were more than were offered in other authorities and residents could also dispose of the leaves at our waste centres. Mr Morley also advised that not all gardens in the City had trees so there would only be a small section of people these collections would cater for so it would be difficult operationally to justify the running of vehicles for a full circuit especially when officers would be required to deal with instances of snow etc at this time.

Councillor Leonard raised the issue of lack of dog waste bins with the creation on new housing estates. Mr Morley advised that they were trying to move away from having bins only specific for dog waste as this would be going to the same place as litter therefore they were using new signs advising to put the waste in a litter bin. Mr Morley also advised that they did not have dog waste bins in every street and it would depend on individual situations but if Members contacted their Area Manager they could assess the situation.

In response to Councillor Leonard's request for the Education Coordinators details to be shared to pass onto the schools, Mr Morley agreed and confirmed that if Members wished to pass on the details of the schools these could be passed on so they contact the school directly. Councillor Leonard wished to thank Mr Morley and the Team for their work.

In relation to queries from the Chairman, Mr Morley advised that they were still going through the results of the weed killer trials due to the changes in the weather the trials had extended into mid November and they were still formally assessing this. With regards to the electric sweeper, this was on trial and so far they had not received any negative feedback from the crews.

Referring to Food Waste, Mr Morley advised that they were still awaiting full confirmation from central government and clarity on funding.

The Chairman also queried if the tree planting funding was being provided through the NECF. Mr Morley advised that funding was for all of our trees and there was a whole list of different funding streams involved.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked Mr Morley for his report. it was then:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2023-24

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), which set out the current work programme for the Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Member's information and possible discussion.

5. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 8th November, 2023 (copies circulated).

(For copy report and notice – see original minutes).

Mr Diamond reminded Members to get in touch if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

6. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) M. BURRELL,
Chairman.