

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 15th FEBRUARY, 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, E. Gibson, Howe, Vardy, Whalen and Wood

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate, Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Kelly, Stephenson, Tye and Wakefield

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 18th January, 2010

Councillor Wood advised that he had not received the information from Mike Lowe, Assistant Head of Performance Improvement, regarding the length of time taken to rectify non-operational street lighting.

It was agreed that this would be chased up and Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, would provide the response to Councillor Wood.

With regards to the request for an item in relation to gritting, Councillor E. Gibson stated that she had expressed thanks to the department and the workforce for their hard work and for working such long hours and asked that this be included in the minutes.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the comment made by Councillor E. Gibson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman advised that there were representatives of the IDEA present who would be observing the meeting. He introduced Members and Officers and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The chairman asked Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny, to introduce the IDEA representatives.

Ms Burnham advised that the IDEA representatives were present to observe the meeting. They had held workshops with Members throughout the day and would be meeting with Partners the day after the meeting.

Review of Accessible Bus Network – Consultation

The Director General of Nexus submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the consultation on the bus network, the targets for accessibility and the proposals for the network.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General, presented the report and advised that there had been a briefing for Members the week before. There had also been a briefing a year ago when the Local Transport Act 2008 had been introduced.

There had been a desktop exercise carried out and there had been a range of proposals for change developed. There was now consultation with Members and Officers taking place and there would be public consultation after this. It was expected that by the summer there would be suitable proposals for Sunderland developed.

Mr Garner drew Members attention to the table in the report showing the current position in the consultation process, step six of twelve had been completed and step seven, the consultation with Members and the Scrutiny and Area Committees, was underway. If there were any suggestions for other forms of consultation he was happy to look at taking them forward. There was a need for input from consultees to ensure that the best possible outcomes were developed.

Councillor Wood welcomed the consultation. He advised that there had been suggestions made by Members and it was good to see these included as it showed that Nexus had been listening to Members.

The proposals would fill the existing gaps in the services, not just by using traditional buses but also by using services such as taxi buses which would serve the heart of the community rather than just operating along main routes. These services would help to provide links to local facilities such as supermarkets and would generally cater for a smaller number of people than the traditional services. There was a gap in the service after the last Metro of the day arrived from Newcastle; he suggested that an additional bus could be provided to cater for the Metro passengers.

Mr Garner advised that this was something that needed to be explored. There had been growth seen in Metro patronage and there were improvements being made to Sunderland Station. There was a need to look at where people travelled to after getting off the Metro. It was often easier for people to travel by other means such as taxis however there would be work done to see if this could be better managed using buses.

The Chairman commented that the only cause for disappointment was the evening services to the Sunderland Royal Hospital; he felt that it was unacceptable that only half of the population would be able to access the hospital within 30 minutes in the evening and there was more work needed to improve this.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted, the evidence received be given consideration and the Members comments be included as part of the consultation on the bus network.

Local Area Agreement Delivery Plans

The Attractive and Inclusive Delivery Partnership submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the Local Area Agreement delivery plan for the services provided by partners who were members of the Attractive and Inclusive Delivery Partnership.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Sal Buckler, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, delivered the presentation which provided Members with background details about the plans including the key aims and purpose of the Delivery Partnership; the Council services and partners which were involved in the partnership; the key achievements to date and the challenges faced.

Councillor Wood commented that the presentation had said that recycling had increased however at the last meeting of the Committee it had been stated that recycling had reduced. He asked for clarification on this matter.

Peter High, Strategic Waste Project Director, advised that there had been a slight reduction in performance last year. There had been a reduction in the amount of waste produced and a reduction in the amount of recyclables.

While there had been a reduction in recycling there had also been a reduced reliance on landfill.

The Chairman introduced Canon Stephen Taylor, Chair of the Sunderland Partnership.

Canon Taylor advised that the Attractive and Inclusive Delivery Partnership was an innovative way of working as normally the physical, structural environment and the community would not be brought together in this way. Sunderland had been shortlisted for 'Place of the Year' and the results from this would be available in March, he was delighted that the city had been shortlisted. The partnership worked to shape communities into somewhere everyone could be proud of.

Councillor Wood referred to National Indicators 175 and 192 which had updates contained in the report, he asked why there was a progress update for NI 192 but not for NI 175.

Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, advised that the progress for NI 175 was calculated at the end of the year and as such the information was not yet available.

In response to a query from the Chairman, Canon Taylor advised that the partnership was still in the early stages, there was a connection being developed between areas and neighbourhoods although there was still time needed to work through this. The Area Committees were now looking at local issues while the Scrutiny Committees looked at the citywide issues.

With regards to the delivery of Legible City ideas the Chairman commented that he was not keen on the title. He would have preferred a simpler more easily understood name and asked whether there was any feedback available.

Ms Buckler advised that there was slow progress being made. This could have been because there was no real understanding of what a Legible City entailed. There was progress being made however it was important to raise awareness of what a Legible city was, that is, a city which is easy to travel around with clear, efficient, easy to understand signage.

The Chairman stated that this could help with bringing the city together, the Coalfield and Washington areas were separated from the central area of the city by the A19 and improved signage could help to bring these areas closer to the city.

Councillor Howe referred to the key aim for Connecting People and Places and asked whether there had been any impact on outward migration and whether the trend had been reversed with people now moving into the city.

Ms Buckler advised that it was still too soon to be able to develop information on the effect on migration, it was hoped that there would be more people

moving into the city however it would take three or four years of tracking the data before any trends could be identified.

The Chairman commented that Sunderland had been ranked as the eighth best city in the UK to live in.

3. RESOLVED that the Delivery Plan be received and noted.

Stadium Village Development Framework

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised the Committee of the responses received following public consultation on the Stadium Village Draft Development Framework and sought the Members comments on the revised Development Framework. The Committee's comments would be submitted to Cabinet on 10th March, 2010 when agreement would be sought to approve the Development Framework as a Supplementary Planning Document.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report and advised Members that a second round of consultation had taken place at the end of 2009, this was as a result of the interest from developers for the development of a real snow Ski Centre which had not been included in the original consultation.

There had been concerns raised regarding parking, especially on match days; the size of the building and the impact on the landscape and the sustainability of the development. These concerns had been addressed and the responses were included in the report.

The responses received had generally been supportive of the framework.

Councillor Wood commented on the concerns surrounding parking, he felt that an increase in the amount of development at the site would increase the parking problems.

Mr Lowes advised that there had been improvements made to the signage to improve the directions to the existing parking. There was a need for parking to be provided for the Aquatic Centre on match days as the facilities needed to be able to be used all year round. If spaces were not reserved for use by the Aquatic Centre then the facility would not be able to be used to its full potential.

The Chairman added that the lease stipulated that on match days the parking was for match traffic only and he felt that this was a problem.

Mr Lowes then stated that there was a need for planning and monitoring of the situation; if there was enough parking provided to satisfy every parking

requirement there would be more parking than facilities. The site had been chosen by the Council and developers because of its location between two Metro stations in an area with a lot of parking provision and near to the city centre. There was a large potential catchment area for facilities at the site and there was the potential that the catchment area could be larger than region wide. Within 30 minutes of the site there was over 1 million people and within 120 minutes, which was a likely travelling time, there was 3.5 million people.

Councillor E. Gibson welcomed the report and stated that it was good that people were being encouraged to use the Metro and other public transport.

Councillor Vardy asked how many people would be using the site on a day to day basis.

Mr Lowes advised that it was difficult to be precise however it was expected that there would be hundreds or possibly thousands of people using the facilities on a day to day basis, this was much less than the Stadium at full capacity on match days.

Councillor Vardy then commented that it would be unlikely that people would use public transport if they needed to take their own skis; he asked whether there would be a ski hire facility.

Mr Lowes advised that there would be a hire facility and that it could be possible to adapt the Metro to enable easy transport of skis if there was the demand.

The chairman commented that he used to ski and it was surprising how many people would take their own skis. These people normally used their own car to get to the facility however some would use public transport.

Councillor Vardy then asked whether the facility would attract professional skiers from further afield due to it using real snow.

Mr Lowes advised that it would be a commercial operation and that the other facilities of this type attracted all levels of skill.

The Chairman stated that there was a need to monitor the parking situation.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the Committee's comments be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Policy Development and Review 2009/10 – Task and Finish Group Update

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee of the work of the Task and Finish Working Group on the introduction of 20mph zones.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor E. Gibson, Chair of the Task and Finish Working Group presented the report and advised that the group had visited North Tyneside Council in January 2010 in order to find out about their experiences with the introduction of 20mph zones and visited a number of sites to see how the zones had been implemented and to view the signing and infrastructure in place. 20mph zones could not be implemented in isolation, they needed to be part of a wider range of safety measures including education, enforcement and infrastructure works.

There had been 'Home Zone Areas' implemented which had helped to reduce speeds in residential areas by removing the distinction between the roads and footpaths and by using different coloured block paving to designate special areas such as parking spaces.

Parking around schools was also being monitored and North Tyneside Council was looking to introduce camera cars to monitor the situation around schools.

The work of the group was a continuation of the work the group undertook last year with regards to parking.

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that Jacobs Consultants would be attending the next meeting of the working group to discuss the details of the proposed 20mph zones and there would be a report back to the Committee in March.

The Chairman praised the Members for the work done; it was pleasing to see works to reduce speed as he felt that reduced speed would lead to a reduction in deaths. He looked forward to receiving the report from the working group.

Councillor Howe congratulated the group for their work on Parking in the city. He expressed concerns over parking around schools. This was a major issue and there were problems throughout the city. There had been an incident outside of Redby and St. Benet's Schools where a child had almost been hit by a car. There were occasional visits by traffic wardens and the signage was to be refreshed and bollards had been installed however he felt that there was a need for a more thorough examination of the area in order to improve safety.

The Chairman advised that enforcement was limited as the Council only employed 10 Civil Enforcement Officers.

Councillor Vardy queried how removing paths could improve safety.

Councillor E. Gibson advised that the layout of the areas lead to drivers questioning whether they should be driving there and encouraged them to slow down. The figures proved that the system worked.

Councillor Vardy then asked how long the Home Zone Areas had been in place.

Helen Lancaster, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, advised that the zones had been in place for at least two years. She agreed to provide the exact information.

5. RESOLVED that the evidence provided be given consideration as part of the Committee's study and the Committee receive further updates from the group.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st February, 2010 – 31st May, 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider the items within the remit of the Committee which were included in the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st February to 31st May, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman advised that there had been an updated plan produced since the Agenda had been published. This updated plan covered the period 1st March, 2010 to 30th June, 2010 and the extract showing the items within the remit of the Committee had been circulated to Members.

Councillor Wood asked that the Committee receive the report to the Cabinet regarding the Highway Maintenance Programme.

Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, advised that the item was a delegated decision which would be made by the Director and Portfolio Holder and as such there would not be a full report produced.

Councillor Wood expressed concerns that he felt that this meant that the Committee could not discuss the item and asked that if possible it was discussed at a future meeting.

The Chairman advised that the item could still be discussed by the Committee and stated that an item regarding this would be included on the agenda for a future meeting of the Committee.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and consideration be given to the Executive's Forward Plan.

Work Programme 2009-10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2009-10 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that the item on Public Toilets scheduled for the March meeting would be moved back to the April meeting.

The Chairman added that this was due to Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, being responsible for that report and the report on Cemeteries and he had asked that the Public Toilets report be moved.

Councillor Wood queried whether there would be an update on the School Travel Plan.

Mr Diamond advised that the Travel Plan Officer would be attending a future meeting of the Task and Finish group.

The Chairman asked whether the report on Fawcett Street would be available for the March meeting.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that the baseline study had been undertaken, there were plans to hold a workshop and a walk of Fawcett Street, it was hoped that this would be arranged in time for the findings to be presented to the March meeting.

The Committee agreed that a workshop and walkabout would be beneficial.

7. RESOLVED that the current work programme for 2009-10 be received and noted.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.