

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 13TH JULY, 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors E. Gibson, Howe, Kelly, Stephenson, Tye, Vardy, Wakefield and Wood

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate, Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Whalen.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 18th June, 2009

Councillor Wakefield advised that he was present at the last meeting and asked that his attendance be recorded.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Wakefield in the attendance.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Lisburn Terrace Triangle Development Framework

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the responses received following public consultation on the Lisburn Terrace Triangle draft Development Framework and which sought the Members comments on the revised Development Framework.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Keith Lowes, Head of Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report. He advised the Members what consultation had been carried out and stated that the responses from the consultation were included in Appendix 2 of the report.

Councillor Howe asked what the timescale was for the work to commence.

Mr Lowes advised that there would be a report to Cabinet in July and then after that the development would be subject to the pace of the developer.

Councillor Wood commented that the consultation undertaken was good and asked why Gateshead and South Tyneside Councils had been consulted.

Mr Lowes explained that there was an agreement in place where documents were shared between the neighbouring authorities. This was to keep each other informed and it was rare that any comments were made.

The Chairman commented that he hoped a response would be received from St. Mowden soon. It was good to see that open space and play provision was being provided within the site. He asked how public art would be included in the site.

Mr Lowes advised that public art was a requirement for the development and if necessary it would be subject to a Section 106 agreement.

2. RESOLVED that the comments made be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Allocation of Additional Funds for Highway Maintenance

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the proposed works for 2009/10 in relation to the allocation of additional funds for highway maintenance and informed the committee on the spend profile for footway and carriageway works from the mainstream capital and revenue budget for 2008/09 and 2009/10.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Graham Carr, Highway Maintenance Manager, presented the report and advised that:-

- Traditionally an additional £400,000 per annum had been allocated to highways maintenance
- This year it was proposed to allocate an additional £360,000 with a further £40,000 allocated to resurfacing roads and paths in cemeteries.

- To date £2.4million had been allocated and had been used to address 'areas of highways at risk'
- The works had resulted in significant savings for the Council as the insurance premiums had decreased significantly.

Councillor Kelly stated that he had been on a walkabout in Washington and had looked at the state of the footpaths in the area. He asked whether Gentoo had provided any funding for the maintenance of footpaths the council had taken back from Gentoo.

Mr Carr advised that the paths used to be part of the Council's Housing department; they had never been transferred to Gentoo as they were part of the highway and therefore could not be sold. He was not aware of any paths owned by Gentoo being taken into Council ownership.

Councillor Kelly stated that on the walkabout Gentoo had provided a map which had shown the ownership of the paths and in Sulgrave there had been a change of ownership.

Councillor Tye circulated a set of photographs which showed the poor condition of some footpaths around the city. The paths were all owned by the Council however they were the responsibility of different departments. He asked what could be done to remove some of the bureaucracy surrounding the ownership of the footpaths.

Mr Carr advised that the land ownership was based around the old committee structure and that when the structure changed the ownership did not. Most of the paths were owned by Development and Regeneration but paths within parks were part of Leisure.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, further explained that the Property Records had been arranged using the old committees structure. The categories now did not exist, however there were different people involved in looking after different areas.

Councillor Tye and Mr Carr agreed to meet after the committee to look into who was responsible for the paths he had identified.

Councillor E. Gibson expressed concerns regarding works carried out by utility companies. Newly replaced, high quality surfaces were often dug up and repaired poorly. Was there any way to force the companies to improve the quality of the reinstatement works.

Mr Carr explained that there was an Act in place which required utility companies to resurface after carrying out works. They were only responsible for their trench and would not touch any of the surrounding area. The Council worked with companies to try to co-ordinate the works to reduce the amount of damage done to surfaces.

Councillor Wakefield referred to appendix 3 of the report, the photograph showed a trench which was clearly visible.

Mr Carr advised that this was probably an old trench; companies were required to guarantee their reinstatement work for 2 to 3 years. If the works were not satisfactory then it was possible for the Council to carry out remediation works and then recharge the company.

Councillor Howe expressed concerns over Members being expected to find and report examples of problems. He asked whether there was any monitoring in place. He also advised that there were a number of potholes on the access road to the Civic Centre car park.

Mr Carr advised that there was a team of Highways Inspectors, Engineers would develop schemes where necessary and these would then be prioritised. This information along with reports from Members would be collated and it could then be decided which roads were the highest priority.

In response to a query from Councillor Wood regarding appendices B and E, Mr Carr advised that capital funding of £1.8million was available for structural maintenance. There was revenue funding totalling £3million available, £1million of this was spent on programmed work with the remainder being available for reactive works when problems were identified by highway inspectors or members of the public. These reactive works were often completed within 24 hours of being reported. Last year there had been £300,000 invested in drainage, this was part of an ongoing maintenance routine. The programme of works was produced at the beginning of the year.

The Chairman commented on the inspections throughout the year. He asked whether any problems found would be added to the programme of works for the next year.

Mr Carr advised that the Highways Asset Plan needed to be consulted as it detailed the longer term programme of works.

Councillor Wood then stated that there was not adequate maintenance and the budget needed to be increased.

Mr Carr replied stating that the highway network was an ever aging asset and that although costs were increasing the budget did not change. Over the last year the cost of materials had increased by twelve percent.

The Chairman then commented that there would never be enough funding available as resurfacing cost £200,000 per kilometre of footpath and £100,000 per kilometre of roadway.

Councillor Vardy asked why there were three wards which were getting more than any of the other wards.

Mr Carr advised that there were issues within these wards which needed addressing. In Washington there was not a traditional footpath and road design.

The Chairman added that these wards had been identified last year as being problem areas which needed the most work.

Councillor Kelly stated that he lived in a court where there was not a footpath, there were tiles on the ground to mark the join between road and path and in winter these became slippery and dangerous. Washington had been designed using an American principal where residents lived and worked within their own villages and if they needed to travel further afield they travelled by car. He also advised that the ongoing works were running behind schedule.

Councillor Vardy then asked what the problems in Hendon were.

The Chairman advised that there was poor quality paving in the area. Mr Carr added that the paths in the area around the old Garths were poor quality.

Councillor Tate, Chairman of Management Scrutiny Committee, advised that the Housing department had owned the footpaths on housing estates but when the housing stock had transferred to Gentoo the Council had retained ownership of the paths and roads. The Washington Development Corporation had been responsible for designing Washington and it was them who had installed the tiles.

Councillor Wood thanked Mr Carr and his colleagues for the work they had done, he recommended that the additional £400,000 continued indefinitely. He also stated that he would like to see the amount increased to cover the increasing costs and return the additional funding to its original value.

In response to a question from Councillor Vardy, Mr Carr advised that the steps around the Civic Centre were the responsibility of Property Services.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and a further report be received detailing the progress on the programme of works.

Policy Development and Review 2009/10: Scope Link to Work Programme: Policy Development and Review

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which put forward proposals for the Committees approval in relation to the forthcoming policy review into Highways Network and Traffic Issues.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman welcomed Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny, to the meeting. She presented the report and advised that the September meeting would be scene setting, representatives from the departments would be in

attendance and the views of the Portfolio Holder would be presented. The terms of reference would also be strengthened. There was a requirement to keep focused to ensure that the policy review was deliverable.

4. RESOLVED that the scope of the policy review be agreed.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st July to 31st October 2009

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with the opportunity to consider the forward plan for the period 1st July to 31st October, 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report, he advised that this was a pilot to see whether it would be useful for the committee to receive the document. This was the full document however in future it was anticipated that only relevant decisions would be provided.

Councillor Tye commented that in his opinion the forward plan was a meaningless document. When he wanted extra information on a decision he would often be told by the contact officer that the report would be available for Cabinet.

Ms Burnham advised that the Forward Plan was a statutory document which outlined the Council's Key Decisions. She stated that she appreciated Councillor Tye's comment, it was felt that scrutiny should be able to use the plan when developing the work programmes, previously officers had been responsible for deciding what was considered by scrutiny, it was now hoped that Members would have more influence.

Councillor Howe commented that he was surprised to see that the Sea Front was not part of the Committee's remit, especially as Coast Protection was.

The Chairman advised that there was an ongoing review, lead by Councillor Charlton, it had been agreed that the committee would not look at the sea front until this group had finished its study.

Ms Burnham added that there were some gaps in the remits as a result of the committee structures changing. It had been proposed that the remits would be reviewed after six months.

In response to a query from Councillor Wood regarding remits, Mr Diamond advised that it had been discussed and agreed that the committee would be responsible for waste management.

The Chairman commented that the system had changed and it would take time before everything was working perfectly.

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5. RESOLVED that:
- a. the Forward Plan be received by the committee in future as part of the ongoing pilot scheme; and
 - b. Consideration be given to the Forward Plan for the period 1st July to 31st October, 2009

Work Programme 2009-10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the current Work Programme for the Committee for the 2009-10 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report and advised that the Work programme was a working document which could be developed throughout the year.

The Chairman stated that he wanted to front load the work programme so that there was more time to look at important reports which were required to come to the committee later in the year.

Councillor Kelly commented that Network Rail were not mentioned for the Public Transport item scheduled for October, he asked whether it would be possible to invite them to the meeting to discuss the Leamside Line.

The Chairman and Mr Diamond advised that it would be possible to invite them to the meeting.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that the Statutory Planning Documents were on a fixed timetable and would not be able to be moved to other meetings.

The Chairman stated that this would not be a problem as other reports would be able to be moved.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the work programme for the year be given consideration.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.