

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 20th APRIL, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, I. Cuthbert, E. Gibson, Kelly, D. Richardson, Scaplehorn, Tye, Wakefield, Whalen, Wood and A. Wright

Apologies for Absence

There were no Apologies for absence

Also Present

Councillor Tate – Chair of Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th March, 2009

Councillor Wood advised that he had stated that there was a danger that bus services would be cut if the five percent profit level of one of the bus operators was not increased to close to the 15 percent profit of the other major operator.

Councillor Wakefield requested that the wording of his question regarding housing land be changed to read: What controls were in place for checking build sites offered by owners in the recent Council survey of potential housing sites. This more accurately reflected the meaning of his question.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the above amendments.

Declarations of Interest

Item 9 – Draft Report of the Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group

Councillor Wood declared a personal interest in the item as Chair of Compass Community Transport, the provider of the Park and Ride service for the Sunderland Royal Hospital.

Study into Public Transport

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to receive an update from Nexus relating to public transport in the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General, presented the report. He advised of the changes to the Passenger Transport Authority which had seen it replaced with an Integrated Transport Authority. He advised of proposed improvements to the Metro services including new ticket machines and 'smart tickets' which would use smart card technology. He stated that the Action Plan Executive Summary he had circulated was to be used to drive improvements to bus services in the region.

Mr Garner advised, in response to questions from Councillor E. Gibson, that members of the public and Councillors were consulted when bus services were changed. There was a panel of 1000 members of the public who were used for ongoing consultation in order to see whether the views of the public were changing. Local consultation was carried out both before and after services were changed in order to check on the impact of changes, this helped to ensure that the right decisions had been made.

Councillor Kelly welcomed the plans and commented that affordable fares were important as it was cheaper to get the bus from Washington to Newcastle than it was to go from Washington to Sunderland.

Councillor Wood asked whether the Local Transport Act would provide more resources. There were gaps in the service provision and he wanted to know to what extent Linkup services could be expected. Would there be any move towards providing a 365 day a year bus service operation. He also asked whether it was likely there would be a full Metro service to South Hylton.

Mr Garner responded to Councillor Wood's questions. He advised that:

- Additional resources were not currently being sought as there was already a large amount available in the region. There were plans to improve the co-ordination of resources within the region and simplify the management agreements.
- There was a need to look beyond conventional services. Linkup buses, Taxi buses and shopper services were all options. Resources could be shared including the use of Social Services vehicles.
- Last year was the first time buses had been run commercially on Boxing Day. It had been successful and it was expected that this would be repeated.
- Extension of the Metro beyond South Hylton was being looked at.

Councillor A. Wright commented that the Action Plan was centred on buses. He asked about the statement that three out of four trips made on public transport were by bus.

Mr Garner advised that taxis were not classed as public transport and as such they were not included in the figures.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding socially necessary services, Mr Garner advised that:

- There was a need to get the most possible value out of the resources available.
- Analysis of the bus operators income had shown that 42 percent of income came from public funds.
- There was a need to better integrate the different services as improvements would lead to more use of the buses.

Councillor Wakefield thanked Mr Garner for the work Nexus had carried out replacing bus shelters.

The Members thanked Mr Garner for his attendance and it was:

2. RESOLVED that the report from Nexus be received and noted.

Project Update: Street Lighting and Highway Signs PFI Contract

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the ongoing progress of the PFI Contract.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Graham Carr, Highway Maintenance Manager, presented the report. He advised that the representative from Aurora had been unable to attend and he would be able to answer questions from Members.

The Chairman expressed his disappointment that Aurora had not been able to send a representative.

Councillor Tye commented that he hoped that the remaining old lights would be replaced. There was often a public perception that there was less lighting when the lights were replaced. He was disappointed with NEDL's performance regarding the repairing of wiring issues as whole streets had been without lighting for weeks at a time.

The Chairman suggested that Gavin Barlow be asked to liaise with Councillor Tye to resolve the issues he had encountered.

Councillor Wood asked whether there were plans to install lighting into back lanes which had not already been lit. He also commented on the savings and advised that he hoped the lights would not be switched off at night.

Mr Carr advised that the savings were based around the costs of operating the old lights; there was no intention to switch off lights however there was the possibility of the lights being dimmed. New technology was also being

implemented to help with savings. Over the next 20 years there would be assessments of the lights and where necessary they would be replaced. All lights would be replaced by the end of the contract. He believed that all of the previously unlit back lanes now had lighting in place.

Councillor E. Gibson advised that in Doxford Park there had been lights not operating for extended periods of time, Aurora; NEDL; Gentoo and the Council were all responsible.

Councillor Wakefield expressed concerns that the installation had been rushed and it appeared that corners had been cut. In Newbottle there had been lights attached to existing wooden poles. Mr Carr explained that sometimes the only solution was to attach the lights to existing columns when there were overhead cables and when there was a need to keep the level of clutter to a minimum.

The Chairman suggested that Councillor Wakefield and Mr Carr liaised with each other regarding specific issues.

Councillor Kelly congratulated Aurora; he had previously had problems, including lights being installed in the middle of pavements, however these issues had been resolved.

3. RESOLVED that
 - a. The report be received and noted;
 - b. Gavin Barlow be asked to liaise with Councillor Tye regarding the problems he had encountered; and
 - c. Councillor Wakefield and Mr Carr liaise with each other to discuss the issues in the Newbottle area.

Performance Report – April to December 2008 (Progress in Implementing the Local Area Agreement and New National Indicator Set)

The Chief Executive, Director of Community and Cultural Services and Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a position statement regarding the first nine months of the Local Area Agreement and the implementation of the National Indicator Set.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mike Lowe, Assistant Head of Performance Improvement, introduced the report and advised that Officers were available to answer any questions from Members.

Councillor Wood queried the 'booster sample' of residents from black and minority ethnic groups. He asked whether this additional sample could have skewed the figures.

Mr Lowe advised that he was conscious of a need to meet the needs of all residents and booster surveys were required across the city to assist with reaching certain groups of difficult to reach residents. The information from these surveys was fed in when different from the results from the citywide information.

In response to a query from the Chairman he advised that the black and minority ethnic groups often did not respond to surveys.

In response to a request for clarification Peter High, Head of Environmental Services, advised that NI 195 was a measure of the percentage of streets that were deemed unsatisfactory for Litter, detritus, Graffiti and Fly posting. Performance was currently better than the target.

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, in response to a request for clarification regarding the Indicators for people Killed or Seriously Injured in road accidents; NI 47 and 48; advised that the new method of expressing the information required a percentage to be shown. The information was based on a three year rolling average which has resulted in an increase being shown however it was expected that it would reduce again in future years. The number of children killed or seriously injured had reduced in all areas.

Councillor Wood queried Indicator 167, journey times per mile during peak hours. Mr Johnson advised that the projected target for 2008/09 was 3 minutes 23 seconds and at the latest update the actual time was 3 minutes and 11 seconds so there had been an improvement over the target.

Councillor Wood then commented on Indicators 168 and 169. He advised that there were a small proportion of roads which had large potholes. Mr Johnson advised that potholes were not covered by the Indicators; it was simply the general condition of the surface.

Mr Johnson agreed to provide precise definitions of non-frequent and excessive as used in Indicators 178a and 178b.

The chairman asked that in future better definitions of the Indicators were provided. Mr Lowe agreed to look at this.

Councillor I. Cuthbert commented on Indicator 192, he advised that the total quantity of waste had reduced and asked whether recycling was down by the same amount.

Mr High commented that it would be fair to say that a reduction in waste would have an impact on the amount of recycling.

Councillor I. Cuthbert then went on to say that there was an increasing use of bottle banks. Recycling centres needed to be looked at as well as the kerb it scheme. The Bring Sites were often a source of problems with people leaving bags of rubbish and the bins were often not emptied.

Mr High advised that there was a fine balance between the sites being useful and being a nuisance. When they were situated next to houses there were often complaints. Publicity of the impact of drinking at home had affected the use of bottle banks as people were embarrassed about how much was being put into the kerb it box. Monitoring and cleaning was carried out at the bring sites to ensure that they were kept as clean as possible.

Councillor Scaplehorn asked for figures relating to the satisfaction levels for recycling services. Mr Lowe agreed to provide this information.

4. RESOLVED that:

- a. The report be received and noted
- b. Mr Johnson provide Councillor Wood with the requested definitions
- c. Mr Lowe provide Councillor Scaplehorn with the requested information regarding satisfaction levels
- d. Mr Lowe to look into providing better definitions of the National Indicators on future reports.

Highway Asset Management Plan Update

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of how the Highway Asset Management Plan linked to other strategies and updated Members on the progress in developing the Highway Asset Management Plan.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, presented the report, he advised that the Highways Asset Management Plan was linked to the Transport Asset Management Plan and the Traffic Management Act which was to be discussed in the next item on the agenda. The Highways plan was the first phase of producing the Transport plan.

Councillor Wakefield asked whether footbridges and subways were included as 'assets'.

Mr Johnson advised that they were; everything highway related was included.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

Implementation of the Traffic Management Act and Network Management Duty

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress made in complying with the Network Management Duty as detailed in the Traffic Management Act 2004.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Graham Carr, Highway Maintenance Manager, presented the report. He advised that the post of Traffic Manager was a statutory post and that the Director of Development and Regeneration had been appointed to the position by the Cabinet and the responsibility had been delegated, as part of the Directorate Scheme of Delegation, to the Head of Transport and Engineering, Burney Johnson.

In response to a query from Councillor Wakefield regarding the A19, Mr Carr advised that the Highways Agency were separate from the council and they had their own Traffic Manager. The Council and Highways Agency liaised closely with each other and other Authorities through the North East Traffic Managers Group.

Councillor I. Cuthbert commented that he welcomed the consultation. In his opinion consultation was often poor so it was good to see thorough consultation.

The Chairman agreed and commented that he would like to see officers engage with the Area Committees.

Mr Johnson advised that there were already plans to go to the Area Committees in order be able to include local knowledge in the plans.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Draft Report of the Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out the draft report of the Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, and Councillor Wakefield, Chair of the Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group, presented the report and the findings of the group.

The Chairman congratulated the group on their work. He stated that if the study had been done as part of the committee then there would have been

less time able to have been spent on it and there would not be such a detailed set of recommendations.

Councillor Wood agreed that it was pleasing to see such a clear set of recommendations. He also advised that the Hospital Park and Ride was now running every 30 minutes.

Councillor E. Gibson welcomed the report and advised that once the measures were in place the residents of Doxford Park would find it easier to access their homes.

The Chairman advised that this was the first time a Task and Finish working group had been used and in his opinion it had worked well. It had helped to build relationships between Members and Officers. He recommended that working groups were used again in the future and thanked the Members involved for their hard work.

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and given consideration.

Draft End of Year Report on the Operation of the Environmental and Planning Review Committee 2008/2009

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out the achievements and reviewed the operation of the Committee over the last year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report. He advised that comments were being sought from Members which would then be fed into the final report.

Councillor Wakefield commented on the potential for reopening the Leamside Line as a result of NPower moving to Rainton Bridge. There would be a significant number of people travelling to the area and reopening the railway would help to reduce traffic problems.

Councillor D. Richardson commented that the Central Route would help to alleviate transport problems.

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the comments be included in the final report.

The use of Planning Obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of existing legislation relating to the use of Planning Obligations and provided guidance relating to the potential

future use of the Community Infrastructure Levy. The item was included as an urgent item as it was an item which had been requested by Councillor I. Cuthbert earlier in the year and it was important that the Committee was able to discuss the item.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report. He advised that Planning Obligations were also known as Section 106 agreements; they were used to ensure that facilities such as children's play provision were provided. A five year update had been presented to Planning and Highways committee in 2007, information relating to Planning Obligations for specific applications was available online as part of the planning application.

Councillor Tye commented that this was a large issue which could not be solved with a few questions; he suggested that a workshop be held to allow full discussion of the issue. He expressed concerns that developments often did not result in new play provision as the money was just paid into a central pot. There were some small play areas which were well used and popular however these were removed and replaced with larger facilities a long way from the area. In some cases there were over 2 miles between home and the nearest play area.

Councillor I. Cuthbert commented that the current strategy was flawed. It allowed existing parks to go to ruin because of development of parks elsewhere. He advised that the play area at the Pastures in Washington had not been removed as the report suggested, it was a well used play area and while there had previously been problems with Anti Social Behaviour this had now eased off. He suggested that the Culture and Leisure Review Committee look at the strategy.

Mr Lowes advised that the examples in the report were to show that there was often local resistance to play areas. He stated that when facilities were to be built within developments then there should be a copy of the plan within the site so that people could see that there were plans for a play area.

Councillor I. Cuthbert also advised that he had asked for a summary of the developments where Section 106 agreements had been signed.

Mr Lowes stated that this was a work in progress and it would be ready for the annual report to be completed in July.

Councillor Wood commented that the levy imposed to pay for infrastructure could be a significant amount of money and it could deter development.

Mr Lowes advised that in Milton Keynes the infrastructure was paid for by the levy's being made on the developments. It was a tax on properties and if the level was set too high it could result in reduced development.

Councillor D. Richardson advised that at some developments, for example Lambton Coke Works, where there would be a large number of houses built, a levy of £600 per house could prevent the development from taking place as the financial burden could make the scheme unattractive to the developers.

Councillor Kelly commented that the funds should be spent locally. There was a need to be careful if implementing a tax on development to ensure that it did not have a detrimental effect on the amount of developments. The money should be kept within the Area to produce benefits within the area the development is in.

The Chairman agreed that there were flaws with Section 106 agreements however they seemed to be better than the Community Infrastructure Levy as with the Section 106 Agreements the money was spent on facilities in the local area. He was concerned that the Community Infrastructure Levy was not targeted enough due to the money being able to be spent anywhere in the wider area. He was keen to see further reports presented to the Committee.

9. RESOLVED that:

- a. The report be received and noted; and
- b. A further report based on the Government's future proposals for the Community Infrastructure Levy be received at a later date.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.