

**At a meeting of the POLICY AND CO-ORDINATION REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 19<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2009 at 4.30 P.M.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Arnott, D. Forbes, G. Hall, Heron, Mordey, J. Scott, Walker, J. Walton, Whalen and T. Wright.

**Also Present:-**

Councillor P. Watson - Leader of the Council  
Councillor Anderson - Deputy Leader of the Council  
Councillor Allan - Portfolio Holder for Resources  
Councillor Charlton - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration & Community Cohesion  
Councillor Blackburn - Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transportation  
Councillor Rolph - Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood & Street Services  
Councillor P. Smith - Portfolio Holder for Children's Services  
Councillor Speding - Portfolio Holder for Culture & Leisure  
Councillor Timmins - Portfolio Holder for Adult Services  
Councillor Trueman - Portfolio Holder for Housing & Public Health  
Councillor Ball - Vice Chairman, Regeneration and Community Review Committee  
Councillor N. Wright - Chairman, Health and Well-Being Review Committee

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors A. Cuthbert and also on behalf of the following Review Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen:-

Councillors Kelly, J.B. Scott, Shattock and Stewart.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009, Part I**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Review Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **Declarations of Interest (Including Whipping Declarations)**

Item 5 – Reference from Cabinet – 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2008 – Budget and Service Reports.

In accordance with Part 5 – [Part 2, Paragraph 11(b)] of the Council's Constitution the following Councillors 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:-

Councillors Allan, Anderson, Blackburn, Charlton, Rolph, P. Smith, Speding, Timmins, Trueman and P. Watson.

Councillors J. Scott, Walker, Whalen and T. Wright declared personal interests as members of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Councillor Tate declared personal interests as a Governor of Hetton Lyons School, a Governor of Hetton Comprehensive School, Chairman of Hetton Home Care Services, an alternate Director of Newcastle International Airport Local Authority Holding Company, a member of Hetton Town Council, a member of GMB and a Council appointee to the Easington Lane Community Access Point and his wife was an employee of Easington Lane School.

Councillor P. Walker declared personal interests as a Gentoo employee, a Governor of Albany School, a Member of Unison, a Trustee of the Washington Millennium Centre was a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme and because his son was employed by the Council.

Councillor Ball declared personal interests as a board member of Gentoo Sunderland Limited, a director of Raich Carter Sports Centre and a member of AMICUS.

Councillor J. Scott declared a personal interest as a member of the following bodies: Northern Regional Brass Band Trust, Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust, Continuing Impartial Care Review Panel, Penshaw CA, New Herrington WMC, Newbottle WMC, Herrington Community Trust and as a governor of New Penshaw Primary School.

Councillor T. Wright declared personal interests as a Director of Newcastle Airport Local Authority Holding Company, Director of Academy 360, Chair of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority, member of NE Regional Employers Organisation, member of Association of NE Councils, member of Local Government Association, member of Roker Regatta Combined Clubs Committee, member of the Tansey Centre, member of St. Thomas' Church, Pennywell, member of Pennywell CA and a member of GMB.

## **Report of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2009, Part I**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2009, Part I, for Members' information.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

## **Reference from Cabinet – 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 – Budget and Service Reports**

The City Solicitor submitted a report seeking the Committee's advice and consideration on the following service and financial plans (copies circulated) which were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2008:-

- (A) Final Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2009/2010
- (B) Collection Fund 2008/2009
- (C)
  - a. Corporate Improvement Plan 2009/2010 to 2011/12
  - b. Capital Programme 2009/2010 including Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy
  - c. Revenue Budget and Proposed Council Tax 2009/2010
  - d. Draft Council Tax Leaflet 2009/2010

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

At the invitation of the Chairman, each Cabinet Member provided the Committee with a brief presentation on the strategic priorities and corporate improvement objectives within his/her portfolio as detailed in Chapters 2 to 10 of the Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) and addressed questions from Members thereon.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Deputy Leader for their presentations and congratulated them on their vision for the City.

Councillor G. Hall referred to the implementation of strategies citing the previous Seafront Strategy which had lain dormant for 7 to 8 years. He referred to the importance of monitoring strategy implementation and asked the Leader if there were any pending strategies which he would especially like to bring to Members' attention. Councillor P. Watson highlighted the Marketing and Communications and the Economic Development Strategies as of particular importance together with the current consultation process on the future of the Sea Front. He was optimistic that the implementation would be fully monitored. What was wanted were outcomes not empty promises in a glossy brochure. Not to plan was to plan for failure. There needed to be an understanding about what the City wanted to do and how it was going to achieve it.

Councillor J. Walton stated that given the previous Seafront Strategy there was a worry that people's reaction to the current consultation would be, 'haven't we been down this road before and nothing has happened'... Councillor P. Watson stated that the Seafront Strategy was a priority for the Council to deliver. It wouldn't make promises that it couldn't keep.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Arnott, Councillor P. Watson stated that he believed it was appropriate to challenge officers' advice in certain contexts but not without good reason in relation to quasi-judicial matters.

With regard to the Resources Portfolio and in response to an enquiry from Councillor Mordey, Councillor Allan advised that the Council would not be involved directly in the provision of broadband connectivity across the City but would be prepared to work with any agency to increase the percentage of usage. With regard to Digital Challenge he advised that the Council had been successful in several bids and programmes had been rolled out across the Hetton, Southwick and Monkwearmouth areas.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor John Scott, Councillor Allan advised that in relation to second stage Single Status the methodology for the job evaluation process had yet to be agreed.

The Chairman congratulated Councillor Allan and the City Treasurer on their efforts to minimise the Council Tax increase and the likelihood that Sunderland's Council Tax would be the lowest in the North East.

With regard to the Children's Services Portfolio, the Chairman welcomed the opportunity that the Children's Services Review Committee had to monitor the school Ofsted reports. He referred to instances where a child encountering problems at school was found to have problems at home and the issue tended to be referred directly to Adult Services. He asked Councillor P. Smith if the appropriate joint working mechanisms were in place. Councillor Smith replied that she was aiming to work better together. Regular meetings were held with the appropriate lead officers together with herself, Councillor Timmins (Portfolio Holder for Adult Services) and Councillor Trueman (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Public Health).

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Heron, Councillor Smith confirmed that the Connexions service would return to the Council as from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009. There would be no change of direction and the Council would enhance the good work currently being done by the service. It would join the integrated Youth Service under Judith Hay (Head of Positive Contribution and Economic Wellbeing).

In response to an enquiry from Councillor J. Walton regarding the future of Fulwell Junior School, Paul Campbell (Head of Resources) advised that the Primary Strategy for Change would require the service to look at all primary schools over the next 15 years. The position of each school would depend on how they matched the criteria of the strategy. At the current time St. Josephs was first in line.

Councillor Arnott referred to the poor performance of boys in their mid teens which had a detrimental effect on the general achievement statistics for pupils in

Sunderland. He asked what would be done to help address this problem. Members were informed that best practice was taken on board from schools where boys' performance was good, for example at Sandhill. Councillor T. Wright highlighted the study undertaken by the Children's Services Review Committee a number of years previously into raising boys attainment which had demonstrated the effectiveness of initiatives being undertaken at Sandhill and Oxclose.

With regard to the Planning and Transportation Portfolio, Councillor Heron stated the need for the Council to be more proactive with regard to its land acquisitions in order to buy up 'grot spots' before they deteriorated further. Mr. Colin Clark, Head of Land and Property, advised that the Council was looking at smarter ways of working with regard to its strategy for future land acquisitions. A small working group was looking at the development of a framework through which future land acquisitions could be planned more proactively.

Councillor J. Walton expressed disquiet from constituents regarding the decline in bus services across the City. Councillor Blackburn referred to the new Local Transport Act 2008 which had created the Integrated Transport Authority and would provide Nexus with the tools to significantly improve bus services in Sunderland. Consultation had been undertaken on the Tyne and Wear Bus Strategy and the information gleaned would enable a more fully engaged dialogue with operators with a view to improving services.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Walton, Mr. Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that wave power was one of a number of options with regard to sustainable energy, however, the Council's jurisdiction ended at low water mark. Beyond that was subject to Crown jurisdiction.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor David Forbes, Councillor Blackburn advised that Nexus had no option with regard to the privatisation of the Metro as it was part of a contract to seek best value. There was a shortlist of 5 tenderers including an in-house bid from Metro.

Councillor Arnott welcomed the significant grant funding that had been made available to improve bus routes but questioned whether the Council was being a bit too obliging to Nexus. He cited the Traffic Regulation Orders to prevent people turning right from Chester Road and concerns raised by local people.

Councillor Blackburn replied that the improvements at the Kayll Road junction had been widely consulted on including Ward Councillors and local residents. Mr. Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, advised that the Council had a duty to listen to the Government regarding the provision of sustainable transport. The amount of traffic on the roads grew at a rate of 1 to 2% per annum. There was no space in Chester Road for a new road and the improvements aimed to deal with congestion generally, not just to help buses. The Traffic Regulation Order at Kayll Road was a 12 month experimental order, which would be surveyed and monitored so that comparisons could be made regarding the new traffic flows and adjustments would be made where appropriate.

With regard to the Neighbourhood and Street Services Portfolio, Councillor G. Hall raised concerns about the recent irregularity of the recycling collections and that when the recyclable items were eventually collected they were just thrown in with the general waste. Mr. Poulter, Head of Project and Service Development, advised that he would seek a response from Peter High, Head of Environmental Services, on behalf of Councillor Hall.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor T. Wright regarding the location of the proposed incinerator, Councillor Rolph advised that no decision had yet been taken. She assured Members that when it was, the decision would be outcome focussed and the technology chosen would be that which best met the outcomes desired.

With regard to the Housing and Public Health Portfolio, Councillor T. Wright stated that there had been some discussion that the Government were looking at ways to get Councils building homes again. He believed that the Government had drawn up a list of pilot local authorities and Sunderland was not on the list. Councillor Trueman replied that he was not aware of such a list, however, he confirmed that Sunderland had been chosen as a pilot authority with regard to local housing companies.

Councillor G. Hall stated that he would like to see Sunderland's base of Registered Social Landlords expanded.

With regard to the Culture and Leisure Portfolio, Councillor Mordey suggested that schools should be encouraged to increase the emphasis they placed on competitive sport. Councillor Speding replied that what was important was that young people were competitive about how they could become fitter. It was, however, an issue that he could discuss with Councillor P. Smith.

With regard to the Health and Wellbeing Portfolio, Councillor Hall congratulated Mr. Neil Revely and Councillor Timmins on the progress made in respect of the Adult Care Partnership.

Councillor Norma Wright endorsed the excellent work that had been carried out within Adult Services. She stated, however, that given the nature of the services on offer there was no room for complacency. She referred to the previous days' Health and Wellbeing Expert Jury Event and a view that had arisen that when a carer worked with a vulnerable person there were, in effect, two vulnerable people. Councillor Timmins confirmed that carers were included as part of the assessment of a vulnerable person.

With regard to the Regeneration and Community Cohesion Portfolio, Councillor Hall welcomed the establishment of the Working Group on the Seafront Strategy and the inclusion of opposition Members. He expressed his concern that with the current economic downturn a number of the City's regeneration initiatives would be placed on hold.

Councillor J. Walton referred to the Seafront consultation questionnaire and in particular the back page. He believed that many people would find the questions

insulting. He had already received 3 complaints and the questionnaire had only been issued the previous day.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Mordey regarding Back on the Map, Councillor Charlton advised that he had attended a number of meetings with Jules Preston. Discussion on the Succession Plan had only started within the last fortnight.

Councillor Arnott expressed the view that the World, and Europe in particular, was being swept by an 'economic tsunami' and that there was more to come. He believed that the Authority could have little effect in this regard. He predicted hard times ahead for local authorities generally, with funding being placed under severe pressure.

Councillor Charlton replied that he believed there was still a role for the Council during the economic downturn and cited the importance of the Working Neighbourhood Fund. He was aware of the view that we should just sit tight and let the situation run its course but believed that it was the role of the Government and local authorities to try and do something to help.

There being no further questions from Members, the Cabinet Portfolio holders retired from the meeting.

At this juncture Members expressed concern at the length of the meeting whilst recognising that they would not wish to curtail their opportunity to receive the Portfolio presentations and ask questions thereon. It was therefore suggested that for 2010 the event be split with five Portfolio Holders appearing before the Committee in January and five in February.

The Chairman then welcomed and introduced Mr. Keith Beardmore, City Treasurer, who proceeded to provide Members with a summary of the budget and service reports and address comments and questions relating to:-

- i) maintenance of the Capital Programme;
- ii) the potential effect of deflationary pressures;
- iii) the continuing importance of efficiency savings.

There being no further questions for Mr. Beardmore, the Chairman congratulated him and the Cabinet Portfolio holders for their efforts to minimise Council Tax rises while striving to improve services.

Mr. Beardmore stated that he would like to emphasise that the preparation of the budget had been a huge team effort and that a great many people, including Directors and Portfolio holders, had put in a lot of hard work.

3. RESOLVED that the Council be advised that the Review Committee congratulated the City Treasurer on his report and noted its contents.

## **Progress Monitor and Work Programmes 2008/09**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) on the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2008-09 Council year and the variations to the Work Programmes for all 6 Review Committees.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Karen Brown, Review Co-ordinator, having advised that an additional variation had been made to the Culture and Leisure Work Programme to provide for a presentation on the Aquatic Centre, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme and the variations to the Corporate Annual Work Programme for 2008-09 be noted.

## **Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006**

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to any individual, which is likely to reveal the identify of an individual, the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) or to consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relations matters arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Signed            R.D. TATE,  
                         Chairman.

### **Note**

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items of business during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.