

**At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 13<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors Foster, Maddison, McClennan, Rolph and Smiles

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Errington, Howe, Kay, Porthouse and Wakefield

**Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2011**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Kelly declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 3 on the agenda as a Cabinet Member and left the meeting once his presentation had been given.

Councillors Rolph and Foster declared a personal interest in Item 6 – Performance Report Quarter 4 as a Council appointed member and substitute on the Tyne and Wear Archives.

Councillor Rolph declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Policy Review – Monitoring of Recommendations as an employee of Durham City Council.

**Policy Review – The Role of Culture in Supporting Sustainable Communities**

The Executive Director of City Services and the Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture submitted a joint report (copy circulated) which provided feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 22 June, 2011, which considered the Committee's Policy Review into the role of culture in supporting sustainable communities.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture, presented the report thanking Members for the opportunity to attend the meeting to provide feedback from the meeting of Cabinet and advised that Cabinet had approved the Committee's recommendations in their entirety. He went on to provide progress updates on the work underway to move forward on the Committee's recommendations as set out in the action plan.

Councillor Rolph commented that a number of the recommendations within the action plan required a significant amount of time and resource and was therefore subject to those resources being identified and asked if this would be an ideal project for a member of the Switch team to undertake on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Kelly advised that the Washington Area Committee had recently accessed a member of the Switch team to undertake a project for them. He understood a lot of those people in the Switch team were already allocated workloads but he agreed to look into the matter and see if there were any resources which could be allocated.

Ms. Zoe Channing, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, Arts, Creative Development, advised that the culture and tourism service had some requests in with the Switch team, specifically around information gathering. She also advised Members that the university were undertaking a mapping exercise around creatives industries which the Council would feed into as part of the process and received information back from them once it was complete.

Councillor Rolph then referred to action d) and the improving of signage to the Wearmouth-Jarrow World Heritage Site and commented that this site was one of many of interest within the city and hoped that all signage would be looked at. Councillor Kelly agreed with her comments and asked that Councillors list areas of interest that they felt required signage, including brown signs, and he would take them back to the relevant service area and have them looked into further.

The Cabinet Member having left the meeting due to his declared interest, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the proposed actions detailed within the Action Plan be received and noted.

### **Building a Sustainable and Lasting Legacy in Sport and Physical Activity Policy Review 2011/12 : Approach to the Review**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought agreement from Members in relation to the evidence gathering activities for the Committee's Policy Review for 2011/12 – Building a Sustainable and Lasting Legacy in Sport and Physical Activity.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that it was to add structure to the review and provide a timeline for evidence gathering along with a number of potential areas to explore.

Councillor Rolph suggested that it may be a good idea to look for evidence of good practice elsewhere that the Committee could use and also referred to previous reviews the Scrutiny Committees had undertaken such as those into the play areas and 'treading water'. She asked if there were any outstanding recommendations from them that could be picked up or ideas that had come from them that could be revisited. Ms. Lancaster agreed to go away and investigate these points further.

3. RESOLVED that the proposed plan for the policy review be agreed.

### **Performance Report Quarter 4 (April 2010 – March 2011)**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing a performance update against the former national indicators relating to the period April 2010 to March 2011.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, and Ms. Kelly Davison-Pullan, Lead Officer for Corporate Performance, presented the report advising that in October 2010 the Government announced that from April 2011 there would no longer be a requirement for Council's to produce an LAA. They also announced the demise of the National indicator set and as a consequence the performance framework is being reviewed. A new framework is being developed that focuses on local priorities and will form the basis of future performance reporting to the Committee.

Councillor Rolph referred to the paragraph within the report on community cohesion and was disappointed that it only referred to ethnic issues and didn't take into account other issues such as disability and age. Ms. Davison-Pullan advised that traditionally they had used the national indicators so there was no active selection but as there was now a move towards a new performance framework they could include indicators that were more relevant to Sunderland and local priorities.

Councillor Rolph then referred to Sport and Leisure and the indicator around the number of adults who partake in at least three sessions of 30 minutes or more exercise. She commented that the Active Sunderland Strategy was measuring for adults who took part in exercise on 5 or more occasions and asked if the recommended activity levels had changed, and if so when and why. Ms. Julie Gray, Head of Community Services, advised that her understanding was that 5 occasions was a health related indicator which was relevant when the Active City document was produced the LAA and national indicators developed, subsequently recorded participation in exercise on 3 occasions which was the indicator that was reported.

Councillor Rolph also asked if the activities being undertaken in the XL villages and youth buses around the city were recorded where young people used the climbing walls, danced or used the Nintendo Wii and commented that if they weren't they should be.

With regards to sustainability, Councillor Rolph commented that she could not distinguish if the indicator around the percentage of CO2 reduction from the local authority was a good or bad thing. The target had been met but she asked if this

was merely due to the fact that with a reduced workforce and a push toward home working how much of it may be simply that the issue had been moved elsewhere.

Ms. Davison-Pullan commented that the appendix to the report may help give more detail but stated that the indicators were complex around what they were actually measuring. She stated that she was happy to look into the issue further and on a more local context if needed. Councillor Rolph asked that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee advising whether there had been real improvements made or if the figures were reduced for the reasons as stated earlier.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for her informative report, and it was :-

4. RESOLVED that the continued good progress made by the Council and the Sunderland Partnership and the areas that require further development to ensure performance is actively managed be received and noted.

### **Policy Review – Monitoring of Recommendations**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with progress in relation to the Place to Play; Access to Housing; and Local Studies Provision Policy Review recommendations

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Lancaster presented the report advising that following Cabinet consideration of the Committee's recommendations from the Place to Play, Access to Housing and the Local Studies Provision Policy Reviews, they had agreed that progress towards the completion of the actions would be monitored through the Action Plan, with standardised six monthly monitoring reports, which this was one of.

Councillor Rolph referred to the recommendation around partnership working with other cultural organisation and the continuance to work in partnership with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, English Heritage, etc and commented that she had not seen evidence that these changes had been made. Ms. Aimee Waugh, Local Studies Manager, advised that she had been working with the records office in Durham and had visited most local studies centres and was now at a point where she was developing the partnerships for the future and working towards regularly attending regional meetings to better link the partnership working between them.

With regards to the Local Studies Groups, Ms. Waugh advised that they were having their first local studies user group in October and interested parties should have received a letter of invitation to it. She confirmed that quite a few groups did attend and offered to provide Councillor Rolph with a list of regular attendees to see if any were missing.

5. RESOLVED that the progress towards completion of the action detailed within the Action Plan be received and noted.

### **Empty Property Plan**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised that the Committee would be briefed on the Empty Property Plan in advance of its consideration by Cabinet

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, presented the report advising that the Empty Property Action Plan 2011-2012 would be being submitted to the November meeting of Cabinet and that this was the Committee's opportunity to feed into the consultation on the Plan that is due to end. He explained that he would pick up the Committee's input today and feed it back into the final report to be presented to Cabinet.

He explained that the plan would serve as a tool to ensure that communities are sustainable at a local level and would ensure early intervention prevents residential empty properties causing problems to neighbourhoods and provide local people with local homes.

Councillor Watson sought more detail on the New Home Bonus Scheme and how they worked and was advised that it was a new government initiative, whereby every new property built or empty property brought back into use would be financially rewarded. These monies could then be used by the Council elsewhere so the onus was really on the Council to ensure empty properties are brought back into use as soon as possible and Members could help in this by sharing their local, grass roots knowledge.

Councillor Smiles asked if the Bonus was a loan or grant and was advised by Mr. Caddick that it was neither, it was an amount the government would give the Council for bringing new homes into the city, so it was more of an incentive.

When asked if this could be abused by private landlords, Mr. Caddick advised that there would be checks and balances in place to establish why a property is not in use and then brought back.

Councillor Foster commented that it was essential to have the input of Ward Members as they could identify properties and use their local knowledge to help the process run smoothly. Mr. Caddick explained that they intended to use Members information as much as possible to gather strong local view. He explained that each area would have a new empty property officer, an environmental health officer and a building control officer to help build intelligence of each area. Members could only add value to this and this was acknowledged.

In response to comments from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Caddick advised that if properties were demolished the Council would not receive any New Homes Bonus. The Bonus was purely for empty properties that were brought back into use.

Councillor Rolph went on to say that it was an excellent report with a lot of information captured in one place and commented that she felt it could be strengthened further as it did not include commercial or community properties at the moment, as it was not just residential properties that could cause issue but now that the government had relaxed the planning legislation around converting commercial

properties to residential this may help. Mr. Caddick commented that the service would work more corporately around picking up owners of empty commercial properties to understand their intentions.

Councillor Watson referred to the number of Gentoo properties that were being built but not selling and asked what, if anything, the Council could do. She referred to the number of people on the housing waiting list and asked if there were any intentions by Gentoo to move to letting the properties until they sold. Mr. Caddick advised that they were looking at how to best work with Gentoo and he was aware that it had happened in other areas where properties had been rented. He did advise that if some of the builds had been undertaken with public funding then they would need to make sure they had agreement on undertaking such a scheme but the Council would have the same approach as any empty property owner in helping them get them back into use.

In response to a question from Councillor McClennan regarding tenants taking up a rental property with Gentoo but then being asked to leave and the issues around their position on the housing waiting list, Mr. Caddick advised that any tenant moving into a property would have certain rights and could not just be evicted. He also advised that the new allocations policy will deal with issues such as tenants who are homeless through no fault of their own and if the Council know in advance that there is going to be an issue they can work with the tenant to prevent them becoming homeless.

The Chairman thanks Mr. Caddick for his informative report, and it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the information received in the report be received and noted.

### **Work Programme 2011-12**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out the work programme for the Committee's work during the 2011-12 Council year.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Helen Wardropper, Scrutiny and Area Support Officer, presented the report advising that any requests for future reports that had been raised at this meeting would be added to the Work Programme at the appropriate future meeting.

Councillor Rolph referred to the make up of the work programme and commented that some of the same issues may be raised repetitively as reports were scheduled to be brought back and asked if it could be coordinated so that this did not occur. Ms. Lancaster advised that she had been having discussions with the Chairman around managing the work programme more efficiently and possibly bringing joint reports where it was felt necessary.

7. RESOLVED that the information contained within the Work Programme be received and noted.

## **Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> September – 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2011**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2011 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the contents of the Forward Plan be received and noted.

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

(Signed) S. WATSON,  
Chairman.