

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 26TH APRIL, 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors E. Gibson, Kelly, Tye, Wakefield, Whalen and Wood

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Ball.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 15th March, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the committee were agreed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Project Update: Street Lighting and Highway Signs PFI Contract

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress of the Street Lighting and Highway Signs PFI. The report introduced the annual report of Aurora, the PFI partner.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Graham Carr, Highways Maintenance Manager, presented the report. Mr Carr advised that the contract was for 25 years and the initial Core Investment Programme which was the renewal and replacement programme had now been completed and Aurora were now focused on the operation and maintenance aspects of the street lighting service.

There were six performance standards set out in the contract and there were deductions made if the standards were not met.

Councillor Tye commented that when there was a concern raised by residents or Councillors there was a need for there to be a proper response provided rather than just a standard response. These standard responses lead to annoyance for residents and it was important for Aurora to improve their customer services and be more sympathetic to the concerns of residents.

Councillor Wood asked how the system of deductions worked.

Mr Carr advised that there were deductions for non compliance set out in the contract.

Phil Jordan, General Manager for Street Lighting Repairs, advised that if Aurora failed to complete tasks within the required timescales then penalties would be received. There was a requirement for Aurora to meet the targets set out in the contract.

Mr Carr further added that there were different rates set for the different performance areas.

The Chairman commented that he did not imagine that there would have been many failures to meet the performance standards given the small amount of deductions made. He asked whether it would be possible for the number of deductions made to be provided.

Mr Carr advised that the large deductions had happened during the installation phase however now that the installation was completed the deductions were much smaller.

Councillor E. Gibson advised that there had been good comments received from residents about the trial scheme on Mill Hill Road which had seen dimming lights fitted. There had however been problems in the regeneration areas where underground cables had been damaged; there had been a lot of incidents where whole areas had been affected by the loss of lighting. Overall the contract was working well.

Mr Jordan presented the progress report from Aurora. There were two areas of maintenance, planned and reactive. Planned maintenance included painting, cleaning and carrying out electrical testing while reactive maintenance was responding to problems such as lights damaged by traffic accidents or vandalism.

There was a new tracking system in place for customer satisfaction.

Aurora had been given responsibility for the decorative lighting at Houghton Feast and the Christmas illuminations and both programmes were delivered to specification in 2009/10.

In addition to the automatically dimming lights being trialled at Mill Hill Road there were also tests of new photo cells underway at Crowther Industrial Estate where lighting would be switched on slightly later and switched off again slightly earlier. This would reduce burning hours by approximately 10 minutes per night which would result in reduced energy consumption. The cost savings for this had not yet been confirmed.

Councillor Tye commented that he would like to see improvements in the system for Councillors to report problems. He queried the possibility of a dedicated telephone line being set up for Councillors to use. He also felt that it would be useful for Members to receive feedback and progress reports after reporting problems.

Councillor E. Gibson asked whether the cost of repairs as a result of vandalism had increased.

Mr Jordan advised that there had not been any increase identified. The areas with large numbers of empty properties and demolition works often had larger levels of vandalism.

Mr Carr added that Aurora had used new lighting in subways which was more resistant to vandalism than the older lighting; this had helped to reduce repair costs.

Councillor Wood commented that it was disappointing that there was no way of reducing the time taken for repairs to be carried out when dealing with NEDL. He asked what the procedure was when there needed to be roads dug up to repair underground faults.

Mr Carr advised that both Aurora and NEDL needed to contact the council to gain permission before starting any road works. He advised that when the faults had occurred with the street lighting along Leechmere Road the faults had been rectified within 20 days. There were risk assessments carried out whenever there were faults and priority was given to those areas where there were junctions or crossings nearby.

Mr Jordan added that Aurora put a lot of pressure onto NEDL however it was sometimes difficult to get them to carry out the work as their target was 35 days rather than the 25 day target Aurora operated. If feasible and necessary then Aurora would carry out temporary repairs while waiting for NEDL to carry out the permanent repair works.

Councillor Wakefield suggested that NEDL be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee where street lighting was to be discussed; there was a need for them to be able to answer the questions about the quality of the service they provide.

The Chairman asked what relationship there was between Aurora and NEDL.

Mr Carr advised that during the first five years of the PFI contract NEDL had shared an office with Aurora and this had helped the two companies to work more closely with each other; NEDL had now moved into separate offices. Street lighting was not a main priority for NEDL; they were more concerned with maintaining public power supplies.

The Chairman expressed concerns over the differences in targets between Aurora and NEDL; he felt that both of the contracts should have the same targets and the companies should be working as closely now as they were during the initial phase of the PFI contract.

Mr Carr advised that although there was an issue with the targets being different any repair work was normally completed within 25 days.

Councillor Kelly commented that in Sulgrave and Concord there had been new lighting installed however there had previously been lights attached to buildings. Some of these lights had been removed but others had not. Some of the remaining lights had been disconnected while others were on permanently.

Mr Jordan advised that there were issues with accessing houses in order to disconnect the lighting. The removal of these lights would be examined.

Councillor Kelly then commented that in some areas the new lighting was worse than the old lighting. There were areas that were in darkness.

The Chairman advised that the focus of the light had an effect on the perceived brightness.

Mr Carr added that the old lights had a 360 degree lighting pattern however the new lights were focused onto the ground.

Councillor Tye expressed concerns over the level of light in parts of Silksworth. He had moved to a new house and the lighting there was brighter than the street lights in other streets in the area.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Performance Report Quarter 3 (April – December 2009)

The Deputy Chief Executive and the Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the committee with a performance update relating to the period April – December 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mike Lowe, Assistant Head of Performance Improvement, presented the report. He advised that this was the standard report which was presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis. The report had been changed to include reporting around the Committee's policy reviews. This showed the progress being made on the performance indicators related to the policy reviews.

Councillor Tye asked for further information regarding NI 48, Children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

Andrew Jackman, Interim Assistant Head of Traffic Road Safety, advised that indicator BV99 showed actual figures. The indicator looked at the accidents over a three year period. There had been a low number of accidents and as such it was difficult to predict trends. There was work being done in conjunction with the police in order to identify where there was most need for targeted safety measures such as education or enforcement.

Councillor Wood asked when the committee would receive the information regarding NI 175.

Mr Lowe advised that the information was collected annually and would be available in September.

The Chairman commented that he still felt that the Appendix to the report needed to be set out more clearly. It was not the easiest of documents to read and it should be written in plain English. There had been progress made and it was important that this was presented in an easily accessible format.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the police appeared to be doing less enforcement. They had a major part to play in road safety. There were regularly cars parked on crossings and in other dangerous places and there needed to be action taken against these people in order to improve road safety.

Mr Jackman advised that the safer roads partnership did a lot of enforcement and that this was predominantly camera based. Traffic was a low priority for the police when compared with other crimes. There was however a campaign currently underway to target use of mobile phones when driving.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that the progress being made continue to be monitored.

Sunderland Destination Management Plan and Regional Update

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the development of a Sunderland Destination Management Plan which set out the aims and objectives for the development of Sunderland as a visitor destination.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Sue Henderson, Project Development Manager, presented the report and advised that this was a five year plan which aimed to develop Sunderland as a visitor destination which would deliver a total visitor experience. There was £14 billion spent on tourism in the UK.

Sunderland was an emerging destination and it was planned to develop the city as a leading destination.

Councillor Kelly commented that he agreed with the principles of the report however he felt that there was a lot of work to be done and there had been very little budget allocated. He would like to see the budget for the project increased. There was a need for the project to be given the necessary support if it was to be viable.

Councillor E. Gibson stated that the lack of good quality hotels in the city was holding the city back.

Councillor Tye commented that there was the potential for more events. There had previously been an Events Safety team however this was now part of the general Corporate Safety department. While he understood the reasoning behind having a centralised department he felt that events safety was a specialist subject and there was a need for experience.

Ms Henderson advised that there was a dedicated officer for each event and that the department liaised with the multi agency groups.

Councillor Kelly agreed that there was a need for a dedicated events safety team, especially as there was to be an increase in the number of events taking place. This should be looked at as part of the report and should receive the necessary investment. He also felt that the beaches were poorly advertised.

The Chairman commented that it could be worth having the Area Committees look at the Destination Management Plan. There was a need for figures to be provided, especially the expected footfall, costs and incomes. There was a need for quality hotels. There should be a dedicated events team especially when the city was attracting large events such as the Pink concert at the Stadium of Light.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Public Conveniences – Progress Report

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a progress report on Public Conveniences within the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, presented the report and advised Members of the public conveniences situated in Sunderland.

Councillor Wakefield commented that he did not feel that the provision in Houghton was acceptable. The only conveniences available were in the supermarket and were intended for use by customers of the supermarket. When the store was closed there were no public conveniences in Houghton. There had been petitions and a Councillor Call for Action and still there had been nothing done to address the situation.

Councillor Wood commented that the use of existing facilities such as those in shops was a good idea however the shops were often not open 24 hours and on Sundays were only open between 10a.m. and 4p.m. There was a need for public conveniences to be available 24 hours a day.

The Chairman commented that it seemed like public toilets were generally ignored. There was a need for adequate provision to be made if there were to be more people attracted to the city. The Chairman suggested that the committee receive a detailed report in the new municipal year.

The Committee agreed with this proposal and it was:

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that a detailed report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Winter Maintenance 2009/2010

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the winter maintenance operations undertaken during the winter of 2009/10.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, presented the report and advised that in October 2009 the Portfolio Holder for Attractive and Inclusive City had agreed the Annual Winter Service Policy Statement for 2009/10. This set out what was expected of the Council including the location of salt bins and the schedules for gritting.

There had been large amounts of salt used by all authorities throughout the country. Some authorities had reduced the amount of gritting that took place; Sunderland however had used road chippings mixed in with the grit so that full coverage could continue while ensuring that the limited stocks of grit were preserved.

Councillor Tye praised the department for their hard work. He commented that the road chippings were still present and asked what would be done about them.

Councillor Wood agreed with Councillor Tye's comments and stated that it would be a big job to remove the road chippings.

Mr Clark advised that there would be an intensive deep cleanse to remove the road chippings and they would be stockpiled for any future severe weather conditions. The road chippings did not degrade in the same way as the salt.

Councillor Kelly asked that Members be consulted in July or August to ensure that the grit bins were placed in the most appropriate locations next winter.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Introduction of 20mph Zones in Sunderland Task and Finish Group Final Report

The Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed the Committee to receive the draft final report of the group on the introduction of 20mph zones in the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Andrew Jackman, Interim Assistant Head of Traffic Road Safety, presented the report and advised that the work with Jacobs Consultants would continue and that the proposed areas would be refined to enable cost estimates to be provided. It was likely that each area would have several small zones within it. The introduction of an Enabling Policy would mean that the Council would be able to continue rolling out the zones until the Council was satisfied that there were sufficient zones in place. There would be monitoring taking place to see a before and after of what the speeds and volumes of traffic were within the areas.

Councillor Wakefield referred to the potential for the implementation of variable 20mph limits. Newbottle Primary School was located on the A182 in Houghton which was a major road. This could be the ideal location to implement a variable speed limit to improve safety around the school.

Councillor E. Gibson moved that option C "That consideration be given to developing a set of pilots from within the 15 areas, in order to assess the impact of 20mph zones in Sunderland and to provide an opportunity to refine

the delivery process” be amended to ensure that all 15 areas had a 20mph zone implemented.

The committee unanimously agreed with this motion.

Councillor Kelly commented that he was looking forward to the proposals coming forward. He had concerns over the financial figures given in the report. North Tyneside had implemented zones which had cost less than the amounts which were given in the report.

Councillor Wood added that there was a need for effective schemes to be implemented and the costs needed to be kept as low as possible.

The Chairman agreed with the comments made by Councillor Kelly and Councillor Wood. He stated that the report set out what needed to be done. All of the zones should be implemented in the order set out in the report. This was an excellent piece of work and he thanked everyone who had been involved in the work.

7. RESOLVED that the draft final report of the Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group be received and noted.

Annual Report of the Committee 2009/10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the Members views on a report setting out the operation and achievements of the Committee over the last year. The report and the comments made by Members would be submitted to the Management Scrutiny Committee on 29th April, 2010. The report would then be incorporated into an Annual Scrutiny Report which would cover the work of all of the Scrutiny Committees.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised that section 3 of the report was the suggested text to be included in the Annual Scrutiny Report. The final report would be submitted to the Council Meeting to take place in June.

The Chairman stated that he liked the way the annual report had been changed to be one report covering all of the Committees. He felt that the final report would be more concise as a result of this.

8. RESOLVED that the draft end of year report be received and noted and that it be submitted to the Management Scrutiny Committee on 29th April, 2010.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 May 2010 – 31 August 2010

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

(For copy report – see original minutes)

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

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.