

**At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 15<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors Ellis, Errington, Rolph, and A. Wilson

**Also in Attendance:-**

Councillor Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Trueman – Portfolio Holder Sustainable Communities

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Chamberlin, M. Dixon, J. Scott and Wares

**Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee**

Paul Power, Sports Delivery and Project Manager, gave Members an update on issues that had been raised by Members regarding the Football Investment Strategy and Councillor Rolph commented on the need for first aiders at football matches held in the community and the possibility of incorporating juniors to help provide it. Mr. Power advised that this scheme would go forward if new facilities were developed and that they would be working closely with learning providers to bolster the number of young people qualified in first aid.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to page 5, paragraph 4, being amended to include 'Councillor Ellis then asked if local residents would not question the planning process for his applications and was advised not to continue with the discussion'.

**Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Rolph declared a personal interest in Item 5 – Policy Development & Review 2009/10: Scope as an employee of Durham County Council.

**Access to Housing Policy Review 2009/10 Progress Report**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a progress report on the policy review – Access to Housing.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, advised Members that Alan Caddick, Head of Housing and Councillor Trueman, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities were in attendance to answer Members queries as part of their evidence gathering in relation to the Policy Review on Access to Housing.

Mr. Caddick advised that the Sub-Regional Choice Based Letting Coordinator had offered to come to speak with the Committee and he felt it would be a good way of expanding the Committee's knowledge around Choice Based Lettings and the consistency of schemes across the sub-region.

Councillor Trueman referred to the planned visit from Stephen Rudge, Head of Housing at Coventry City Council to discuss allocations policy and indicated that he would be interested to meet with him and would try and arrange a meeting with him. He commented that partner working was important and advised the Committee that he was a member of the Regional Housing Board, the Sub-Regional Board and the Sunderland Partnership.

He advised Members that the Homeless Team were now back 'in-house' and using the points allocation system, which had been used in the past and worked well.

He also commented that many local authorities had learnt lessons from the private landlord schemes of what worked and didn't and felt that future developments in housing policies would prove an interesting review topic.

Mr. Caddick agreed with comments made and was looking forward to the Committee's findings of the need for change in housing and how it is allocated across the city.

Councillor Rolph commented that the policy review had much focus on the rented housing sector and felt that by also looking at affordable housing to buy it would add value to the review. Mr. Caddick agreed and advised that options were currently being looked at for incentives to help people access affordable housing. He commented that it may be beneficial to consider social housing as part of the review matter also as there is a lot of social housing within the city but it is felt that it doesn't meet resident's aspirations. It would best if the Committee were able to consider the whole range of housing available in the city.

With regards to how affordable housing is accessed a viability study would need to be carried out around the policy as if its not right it can get challenged as it has in other regional authorities. The Council are keen to ensure they look at the whole trajectory of housing schemes available to potential buyers such as subsidised mortgage schemes as there are various ways to try and address the issue but its also about ensuring people are aware of what it is available to them. Councillor Trueman commented that the phrase 'affordable housing' is interpreted differently by different people and it first need to be identified what is being expected by it.

Councillor Watson asked if Council land was available for developers to be given free of charge to developers so that they could build houses at a lower cost and Mr. Caddick stated that the issue would need to be looked at in the future.

Councillor Errington informed the Committee that the University highlighted landlords to new students coming to the campus and Mr. Caddick advised that the University were members of the partnership and that the accredited landlord list was available for anyone to see on request. He was aware that a number of pupils had benefited from the scheme and that the University tried to provide as much advice and guidance on renting accommodation as they could.

There being no further questions for Mr. Caddick or Councillor Trueman, the Chairman thanked them for their report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and to agree to reasonable expenses in relation to travel and accommodation for the visit of Mr. Rudge from Coventry City Council.

### **Policy Development & Review 2009/10 : Scope**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which put forward proposals and sought agreement from Members in relation to the forthcoming policy review of Local Studies.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised that the aim of the review was to look into the current service provision for Local Studies in the city and consider how to further promote local history in a joined up way, providing a clear strategy for development in the area.

Councillor Rolph commented that she was pleased that the Committee were reviewing the Local Services Strategy and suggested that it would be worthwhile to contact local archivists and history groups to learn of their experiences using the facilities and what they felt was needed to improve them. She also suggested that the Committee look at what barriers people find in using the current provision and possibly use the Sunderland Echo or Community Spirit to gather a wide range of opinions.

Councillor Errington commented that there was a need to look at how the Council compile what is already available in the city and document where it is stored. Residents could be asked to contribute any items they owned and then a stocktake of what was available could be taken and publicised over the internet for users to search.

Councillor Ellis agreed that it would be beneficial to carry out a stocktake of available items but felt that there would not be time to undertake it as part of this review. She also commented that it would be worthwhile considering providing a local studies centre in several areas around the city so that people did not have to travel into the

city centre each time they wanted to access the facilities.

Councillor Rolph advised that the Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Joint Committee were carrying out a similar project and felt it was more appropriate for them to undertake this than local libraries or museums.

Julie McCann, Principal Librarian E-Resources and Information Services, thanked the Committee for their comments and welcomed their input and advised that the Library Service worked with a lot of local groups who were happy to have an input into the work of the review and that they were actively looking to encourage the use of the local studies centre.

The Chairman having thanked the Officers for their report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the scope of the Scrutiny Committee's local studies review for 2009/10 as outlined in the report be agreed.

### **A Place to Play – Progress of Review Recommendations**

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Members on the progress against the policy review recommendations from the A Place to Play review.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Zoe Channing, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, presented the report advising Members of the key recommendations coming out of the Committee's a Place to Play review and progress made against each of them to date.

Councillor Ellis referred to the potential sites for poster points and asked if local areas would be included. Ms. Channing advised that primarily, city centre sites were identified but as part of the wider music strategy they would be looking at other sites where cased posters could be situated. Councillor Rolph suggested that monitors could be used around the city to display information without adding to street furniture.

With regard to recommendation 5 and ensuring that music plays a prominent part in future flagship events, Councillor Rolph suggested that the new community news letters could be used to publicise local events.

Councillor Rolph referred to recommendation 16 and supporting the refurbishment of Holy Trinity as a potential future venue and advised that other facilities such as St Michael's Church in Houghton had been newly refurbished. The acoustics in the church were ideal for music events and the facilities were underused by the community in that way at present.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Channing for her report and the Officer having taken Members comments on board, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the update be received and noted as part of the monitoring arrangements for the policy review recommendations.

### **Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the period 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2009 – 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2010**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2009 – 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2010 which relate to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Cummings advised Members that an updated version of the forward plan had been circulated for their attention.

Councillor Rolph believe that there were still issues around the current system of reporting Forward Plan items to the Committee prior to Cabinet and identified examples where the Committee were unable to pre-scrutinise items on the forward plan. She referred to items 01347 (to approve charging for the project management of self funded home improvements) and 01348 (to adopt a sustainability policy for the Council) and felt that these were two core business items that the Committee were not getting chance to comment on. Mr. Cummings advised that Jim Gillon, Sustainability Coordinator, would be presenting a report to a future meeting of the Committee on climate change.

The Officer commented that the previous month Members had raised concerns over not considering the Design Guide – Accommodation with Support and that it was now to be presented to the Committee prior to its consideration by Cabinet. He advised he would investigate whether anything could be done regarding the items raised by Members.

Councillor Errington referred to item 01338 (to approve wind turbine development options for Council land and property) and commented that it was a key activity to be undertaken by the Council and felt it was true and proper for this Committee to consider the item. Mr. Cummings agreed to look into this item also.

5. RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be received and noted.

### **Work Programme 2009-10**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2009-10 Council year.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, having advised that he would add to the work programme the heritage report Councillor Rolph had requested at the last meeting, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the Work Programme be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) S. WATSON,  
Chairman.