

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27th April 2010

ANNUAL REPORT

Report of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP2: Healthy City.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver 'One City'.

1. Why has this report come to the Committee?

- 1.1 To approve the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee report as part of the overall scrutiny annual report 2009/10, that is to be presented to Council.

2. Background

- 2.1 In previous years each scrutiny committee has published an individual account of the work conducted by the committee in an annual report, and was presented to Council. The annual report reflected the committees work programme and included achievements, highlights and policy review work.
- 2.2 This year for the first time the annual report will be a single combined report of all seven scrutiny committees. The annual report will outline the development in the scrutiny function and provide snapshots of the outcomes achieved during the last 12 months.

3. Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee 2009/10

- 3.1 The proposed Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee report is attached at appendix 1 for member's consideration. The report provides a very brief snapshot of the some of the main work undertaken by the committee during 2009/10. It should be noted that the report is written from the perspective of the Chair of the Committee reflecting over the year.
- 3.2 Some of the main themes covered in the annual report revolve around the following issues:
 - Policy Review: Access to Social Housing in Sunderland
 - Mini-Review: Local Studies Provision in Sunderland
 - Annual Sport Report
 - English Heritage Workshop.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The Committee has developed and delivered an ambitious work programme in 2009/10, which is reflected in the annual report. The Scrutiny Committee has worked well with Council Directorates, stakeholders and partner organisations to deliver the work programme and the Scrutiny Committee has tackled a number of issues throughout the year and looked to work with officers and stakeholders to provide solutions and improvements to services delivered across the city.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 That Members approve the Sustainable Communities report 2009/10 for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 2009/10 Agendas

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APPENDIX 1: ANNUAL REPORT

Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee 2009/10

Chair: Cllr Susan Watson

Vice-Chair: Cllr David Errington

Committee Members:

Cllr Tom Foster, Cllr Kath Rolph, Cllr Jim Scott, Cllr Ross Wares, Cllr Amy Wilson, Cllr Kath Chamberlin, Cllr Michael Dixon, Lillian Walton and Cllr Sheila Ellis.

The review and development of the scrutiny function in Sunderland led to the formation of a brand new seventh scrutiny community, and it gives me great pleasure to present the first annual report of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

Social housing is always going to be a topic that generates interest, particularly with current drives to ensure fairer and more flexible approaches are adopted to social housing allocation. With this in mind it was of little surprise that the first major review for the committee was around the access to social housing in the city.

The committee in gathering evidence for the review held a number of focus groups with key stakeholders including social housing providers and private landlords. To add to this we also received presentations at committee around regional Choice Based Lettings and also from the homeless charity Shelter. Members of the committee also visited a Gentoo Customer focus group to talk with social housing tenants around their own experiences. In conducting this review we were also very fortunate to be able to invite Coventry City Council to Sunderland to share their experiences of Choice Based Lettings with the committee.

The review has proved a worthwhile piece of work to undertake and the committee has gathered a lot of evidence during the year. With the invaluable contribution from my colleagues on the committee we have highlighted a number of issues and recommendations, which will help improve the customer experience in accessing social housing within Sunderland.

As well as looking at social housing, the committee also decided to undertake a lighter review into local studies provision in the city. Programmes like the BBC's 'Who do you think you are?' has increased public interest in local studies and now almost 70% of visitors and enquiries are about family history.

As part of this review members of the committee visited local studies centres in Sunderland, Washington and Newcastle, and also held a focus group with local studies centre staff and service users. The review was interesting and certainly highlighted the importance of local heritage and the enthusiasm that many people have for it. Although not as in-depth as our main policy review we have still made a number of recommendations that can help to promote and develop the local studies service further.

Following on with the theme of heritage a Christmas workshop was organised by English Heritage in Newcastle. The aim of the workshop was to look at establishing relationships and see where scrutiny committees and English Heritage could work in partnership on appropriate projects. Only two local authorities attended this workshop and I am pleased to say that we were one of those. The importance of our heritage cannot be underestimated and we will look during the coming years to see how we can develop some of the themes highlighted at this workshop for the benefit of Sunderland's own rich heritage.

The role of sport, play and wellness cannot be underestimated and the committee recognises the part they all have to play in creating inclusive communities within Sunderland. The committee was pleased to be given the opportunity to comment on the progress, achievements and future work of the City Services Directorate in relation to Sport, Wellness, Aquatics and Play. The committee have also been involved in the Football Investment Strategy and recently received a presentation from consultants, Knight, Kavanagh & Page, which outlined the work that had been done and how the strategy will help to provide clear pathways for improvement and investment in football pitches across the city.

The challenge for any new committee is in developing and establishing a varied and robust work programme, and throughout this first year of operation I feel the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee has achieved a great deal. I look forward to the coming year and the challenges that this will bring and I feel sure we will build on our early achievements.

Cllr Susan Watson
Chair of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee