

At a meeting of the PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mordey in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bell, Ellis, S. Foster, Gallagher, P. Gibson, Howe and Snowdon.

New Wear Bridge

Prior to consideration of the formal business, the Chairman informed Members that the Council's £82.5 million bid for funding towards the new wear crossing project had been approved by the Department for Transport. He paid tribute to the Leader of the Council and all involved in the submission and hoped it would be just the first of many regeneration projects in the City.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Walton and Wilson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 26th October, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 26th October, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

University City Policy Review 2011/12 – Feedback from Visit to Sheffield Hallam University

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided feedback to the Committee on its visit to Sheffield Hallam University undertaken on 24th – 25th November, 2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report highlighting the welcome and introduction provided by Pro Vice Chancellor Mike Smith, the Business School Knowledge Transfer Programme, the Material and Engineering Research Institute Innovation Futures Project and the Hatchery Business Incubator.

Of particular interest had been the information provided by John Kirby, Creative Director in respect of the Design Future which brought a wide range of expertise from the University to solve particular problems in industry in relation to packaging and design.

David Donkin (Assistant Director, Business Development) of the University of Sunderland had also attended the visit and found it very useful. In this regard he had also extended an open invitation to the Committee to attend a similar tour of the University of Sunderland.

Councillor Gibson felt that the visit, despite being informative regarding the services provided, did little to highlight the relationship between the City Council and the University, nor identify areas of best practice that could be adopted in Sunderland. He hoped that this was an aspect that could be built into the visit to the University of Sunderland. The University's ability to utilise ERDF grants had been well demonstrated however.

Councillor Snowdon highlighted that one aspect of the relationship between Sheffield City Council and the University had been the support provided to the University in respect of its land acquisition and the development of the street scene around its campus.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Diamond for his report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be received and noted, and
- (ii) arrangements be made with Mr. David Donkin with a view to undertaking a similar Committee visit to the University of Sunderland.

Performance Report, Quarters 1 and 2 (April –September 2011)

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a performance update for the period April to September 2011 with regard to the areas within the purview of the Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Kelly Davison-Pullan, Lead Officer for Performance, presented the report informing Members that for 2011/12, the Council's aim was that performance reporting should be focused on the key priorities for the people, place and economy of Sunderland and should continue to be a robust appraisal of the situation resulting in actions. It should cover the main strengths, areas for improvement, outstanding risks and how these were being addressed. This was a move away from simply reporting all performance indicators with no weighting to reflect their relative importance to the Council. Instead, the aim was to draw attention to the areas that mattered most and maximise improvement to deliver Value for Money.

In this regard Ms. Davison-Pullan highlighted the key performance issues in respect of the percentage of the working age population in employment, business registration, factors influencing the increase in unemployment and the attraction of inward investment.

In conclusion Members were informed that following a review of the performance framework around prosperity, in the future this would be structured around the agreed outcomes of the City's Economic Masterplan.

At this juncture the Chairman welcomed and introduced Laura Johnstone, Whole Family Approach Co-ordinator, who tabled for Members information, a briefing note in respect of the 'Family Wise' Programme. Members were advised that the Government had committed £200 million of European Social Fund finance towards supporting families with multiple problems to overcome barriers to employment. In the North East, The Wise Group had been selected as the prime provider. They had commissioned Barnardo's, Children North East, DISC, JET, Shelter and Five Lamps to provide specific support around families, young people, substance misuse, gangs, homelessness and financial inclusion. The Wise Group had subcontracted the delivery of their Family Wise programme in Sunderland to Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC).

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Gibson, Ms. Johnstone confirmed that while she had only been seconded to the project since September, she believed that SNCBC would have the capacity to deliver the programme. It was however something that only time would tell.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Howe, Ms. Johnstone advised that although the eligibility criteria referred to 'legally resident' in the UK, the term had not been defined. It was thought however that this would exclude asylum seekers.

With regard to promoting the programme, the Chairman advised that the Community Voluntary Sector Network would be a good place to start.

Councillor Snowdon expressed her best wishes to Ms. Johnstone and stated that the 'whole family' approach taken by the programme was to be welcomed.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Davison-Pullan and Ms. Johnstone for their reports it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the areas of good progress made by the Council and those areas requiring further improvement as highlighted in the performance report be noted,
- (ii) the information contained in the Family Wise briefing note be received and noted, and
- (iii) an update report in respect of the Family Wise programme be submitted in 12 months time.

Welfare Benefits Update Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a comprehensive presentation from Fiona Brown (Head of Transactional Services) on the implications of proposals for welfare benefit reform on communities within the City.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes).

Members were provided with:-

- (i) a background picture and explanation of the context in which the reforms were being made,
- (ii) a detailed overview of the Government's proposals, together with an analysis of the likely impact on the Council and the City as a whole, and
- (iii) a description of how the changes would be responded to, including those actions currently underway, planned future actions and the partnership working being undertaken by the Council and wider organisations across the City.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Brown for what he believed to be an important but very saddening presentation.

Members unanimously expressed their concern at the likely impact of the Government's proposals on the residents of the City and the wider area. Councillor Howe described the measures as draconian at best. Councillor Ball stated that what she had heard had left her in total shock. Councillor S. Foster advised that he was appalled and saddened by the proposals. Councillors Gallagher and Snowdon in particular expressed concern at the impact the regulations regarding under occupancy would have on the families of Sunderland.

In thanking Ms. Brown for her attendance, the Chairman stated that whilst it was important that the nation continued to reduce its levels of debt, the Government's means of doing so appeared to be solely at the expense of the poor and vulnerable.

4. RESOLVED that the presentation be received and noted.

Work Programme 2011-2012

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) appending the current work programme for the Committee's information.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman advised that he had requested that a briefing for Members on the new Wear Bridge be included on the agenda for the January 2012 meeting.

Councillor Bell having requested that an item on the Mary Portas report into the Future of the High Street be accommodated within the Work Programme, it was:-

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

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st December, 2011 – 31st March, 2012

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 1st December, 2011 to 31st March, 2012 which related to the Prosperity and Economic Development Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. RESOLVED that the contents of the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st December, 2011 to 31st March, 2012 be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and offered his best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Joyous New Year.

(Signed) M. MORDEY,
Chairman.