

**At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.**

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors Chamberlin, M. Dixon, Ellis, Errington, Foster, Rolph, J. Scott, L. Walton, Wares and A. Wilson.

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies for Absence

All Members of the Committee being present, there were no apologies for absence.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 14th July, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 8 – Forward Plan

Councillor Wares declared a personal interest in relation to the Item 01189 concerning a request from Gentoo to amend its borrowing powers.

Councillor Wares declared a personal interest in relation to Item 01280 in relation to the sale of land to HMCS for a new Justice Centre.

Policy Development and Review 2009/10: Approach to the Review

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking agreement from Members in relation to the final terms of reference for this year's Policy Review – Access to Housing.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, briefed the Committee on the report, drawing Members' attention to the proposal to set up a Working Group to meet on a regular basis outside of the Committee, to bring forward ideas and ensure all relevant issues were considered and brought to Members' attention.

Councillor Rolph enquired as to whether the issue of empty properties in the City would be included in the policy review and that with respect to the issue of a single route into housing she commented that she did not see easily how this would slot in. Councillor Rolph asked whether there was any place for innovative ideas or would the review be concentrating on rented use in the traditional way.

Mr. Cummings advised that he would pass on the above comments to colleagues in Housing Services to include in the scope of the review. He confirmed, in response to Councillor M. Dixon, that Mrs. Pauline Blyth, Head of Business Support and Workforce Development, would be attending future meetings in the absence of Mr. Alan Caddick and Mr. Peter Smith, Housing Advice Manager, would be supporting the review.

Councillor J. Scott referred to paragraph 6.1, detailing the scope of the Review and commented that there was no mention of the quality of housing and suggested that the review also look at enforcement powers available to make landlords upgrade their properties.

The Chairman stated that this needed to be incorporated into the scope of the review.

The Committee having given consideration to the recommendations detailed at paragraph 9 of the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the policy review be named 'Access to Housing in Sunderland';
- (ii) approval be given to the establishment of a Working Group in order to progress the policy review work as outlined in the report and that Councillors M. Dixon, Errington, Rolph, S. Watson and A. Wilson be appointed as Members of the Working Group; the Scrutiny Officer to contact Members with arrangements for the first meeting; and
- (iii) approval be given to the outline aims, objectives and scope for the review as detailed in the report, together with the inclusion of the comments raised at the meeting.

Update on Policy Review Recommendations – 'A Place to Play'

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating the Committee on progress against the policy review recommendations from the 'A Place to Play' Review.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Zoe Channing, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, Arts, Creative Development, briefed the Committee on the report. She advised that there had been significant progress made on most of the recommendations. She highlighted the music concerts held in the City at the Stadium of Light and Music Festival and the development of the Arts Centre, Washington as a music venue, as well as the development in relation to a centralised ticket sale facility as detailed at recommendation 9.

Councillor Rolph referred to recommendation 5 'to continue to ensure that music plays an important part in festivals' and asked for assurances that Houghton Feast was considered a flagship event and that it would continue to be supported.

Ms. Channing confirmed that Houghton Feast was considered a key event and advised that arrangements were just being finalised for the festival next month.

Councillor Rolph enquired whether, in relation to recommendation 13, any thought had been given to using empty shops for music events or to bands using them for rehearsals.

Ms. Channing advised that consideration had been given to using empty shops for exhibitions, However thought would be given to using them in the ways Councillor Rolph had suggested also.

Councillor Rolph asked whether thought had been given to involving Members on the Music Development Group.

Ms. Channing stated that she would discuss this with Mr. Cummings and come back with a recommendation on the issue.

Councillor Wares referred to recommendations 7 and 8, concerning issues around transport and the proposal to develop a Sunderland directory of rehearsal and performance spaces and stated that he was pleased to hear that these were being picked up.

Councillor A. Wilson commented that the Sunderland directory was a brilliant idea and enquired whether Officers were any further forward to finding funding.

Ms. Channing advised that she was looking at funding from the Arts budget to develop the directory as it was seen as a priority and something that needed to be developed.

In response to Councillor J. Scott, Ms. Channing advised that Officers in the Arts and Creative Development Team were working with clubs etc. to explore the development of a promoter's network for Sunderland and that an update would be provided in the next quarterly report.

In response to Councillor Errington, Ms. Channing advised that in relation to recommendation 13 concerning music venues, that she was not aware that the CIU

had been approached as to what facilities they could offer but that she would take this back and make enquiries.

In response to Councillor M. Dixon who enquired whether the recreation area at the seafront had been used for music festivals, Ms. Channing reported that the recreation ground had not been used and this may be a venue that could be used in future. She added that Cliffe Park had been used for three events last year.

3. RESOLVED that the update be received and noted as part of the monitoring arrangements for the policy review and that the further information required as detailed above, be provided for the Committee.

Performance Report and Value for Money Self-Assessment 2008/2009

The Chief Executive, Director of Financial Resources, Executive Director City Services, Executive Director Health, Housing and Adult Services and Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a joint report (copy circulated) providing Members with a value for money assessment in relation to Sustainable Communities for the period April 2008 to March 2009 as part of the Committee's work programme. The report included findings from a range of performance information including spend, investment, improvements, residents perception and both national and local indicators including those within the Local Area Agreement.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Gillian Robinson, Corporate Performance Monitoring Manager proceeded to brief the Committee on the report and referred Members to Appendix 1.

Ms. Robinson drew particular attention to the finding of the Ipsos MORI residents' survey for 2008 which showed that residents' satisfaction levels with homelessness and housing advice had improved from 38% to 51%. She highlighted paragraph 4.5 of the report concerning the work in relation to reducing the risk of homelessness.

Ms. Robinson advised that the next steps included building on the successes of services such as telecare to explore new ways of delivering services and working with housing partners to provide affordable housing and improve choice, quality and design of property available for vulnerable people which included extra care schemes. In addition to this the implementation of a business improvement project to reduce the risk of homelessness through provision of earlier and more joined up information, advice and support.

Ms. Robinson briefed the Committee in relation to each of the service areas contained in the appendix to the report.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired whether Barclay Lodge and Camrex House were used to accommodate homeless people and commented that, if not, he felt that the Council should use the links it has with places like these.

Councillor Rolph enquired what was meant by 'affordable housing' and asked whether there was a definition.

Ms. Robinson confirmed that there was a definition which would be included in future reports for Members' information.

In relation to culture, Councillor Rolph commented that the Council did not measure residents' satisfaction with historic sites and enquired how it knew therefore, how people felt about them. She asked whether there were any plans to measure satisfaction in the future in this respect.

Ms. Robinson advised that there were no plans to measure satisfaction in this regard but that she would take back Councillor Rolph's enquiry.

Councillor Rolph referred to Section 5.3 included in the activities relating to sustainability and asked for more information concerning the wind energy programme to install 3 wind turbines on Council land and also in relation to Section 5.7 as to what was included.

Ms. Robinson stated that she would ask for this information to be circulated.

In relation to Councillor A. Wilson's enquiry concerning the number of affordable homes provided, Mr. Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment advised that the information detailed in the report in connection with the Housing Strategy on page 23 of the agenda related to land immediately available and so, attractive to developers. The indicator was subject to change year on year. There was some take up but this had been affected by the economic downturn. However, despite this, 299 additional homes had been built during 2008/2009 which was an improvement on the previous year of 186 homes.

In relation to Community Cohesion and the findings detailed in paragraph 3.2 of the report that 39% of respondents perceived that people in the area do not treat one another with respect, Councillor Errington enquired as to whether this related to specific areas and asked for information as to what work had been done to turn this around.

Ms. Sal Buckler, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, referred the Committee to Section 4.1, detailing the indicator titles in relation to Community Cohesion. She advised that a breakdown of this information was available and a report would be submitted to the December meeting. Ms. Buckler added that evidence showed that Community Cohesion was worse in more deprived areas.

In response to Councillor Ellis, Ms. Buckler stated that efforts would be focussed on improving the number of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality in the most deprived areas initially, however, in order to achieve 50% it was recognised that initiatives would need to be rolled out to other areas.

4. RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted and that the comments brought out during the discussion be included in the 2008/2009 value for money assessment to be presented to Cabinet in October 2009 where relevant.

Request to Attend Conference

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) for the Committee to consider sending delegates to the Housing Quality Network Conference entitled 'Under Pressure – Fairness and Flexibility in Local Housing'.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members considered the report and it was felt appropriate for those Councillors appointed to the Working Group for the Policy Review to attend the Conference.

5. RESOLVED that Councillors M. Dixon, Errington, Rolph, S. Watson and A. Wilson be authorised to attend the conference subject to diary commitments; the cost for Members' attendance to be funded from the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee budget.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st September – 31st December, 2009

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 1st September – 31st December, 2009 which relate to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Rolph requested that in future the Committee receive a full copy of the Forward Plan in order to identify the items they would like to give consideration to.

In response to Councillor Rolph, Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, confirmed that the Committee would receive a report on the Young Persons Supported Housing Project and that this would be included in the Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

6. RESOLVED that the Committee receive a full copy of the Forward Plan for the relevant period in future.

Work Programme

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

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, advised the Committee that a report on a draft protocol for the appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council's Scrutiny Committees would be submitted to the October meeting.

In response to Councillor Rolph, Mr. Cummings advised that he would ensure that the report on the Heritage Update scheduled for the November meeting would include information on Local Studies.

Councillor Errington requested a report be submitted to the Committee on Heritage Open Days.

Councillor Rolph requested that a report on 'Britain in Bloom' reporting on the successes the City has enjoyed, be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

7. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme be noted and that the matters detailed above be also included on the programme in line with Members' requests.

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

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.