

Sunderland City Council

At and EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL held in CITY SPACE, SUNDERLAND UNIVERSITY on WEDNESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2012 at 6.00pm

Present: The Mayor (Councillor I Kay) in the Chair
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor R Heron)

Councillors	Allan	Farthing	Mordey	Tate
	Anderson	Fletcher	Oliver	Thompson
	Atkinson	Foster	Porthouse	D. Trueman
	Ball	Francis	Price	H. Trueman
	Bell	E. Gibson	Richardson	Turton
	Blackburn	P. Gibson	Scanlan	Tye
	Copeland	Gofton	Scott	Wakefield
	Curran	Jackson	Shattock	P. Watson
	Davison	Kelly	Smiles	S. Watson
	Dixon	Lawson	D. Smith	Williams
	Ellis	McClennan	P. Smith	A. Wilson
	Emerson	MacKnight	D. Snowdon	D. Wilson
	Errington	T. Martin	D.E. Snowdon	Wiper
	Essl	F. Miller	Speding	Wood
	Farr	G. Miller		

Panel Members: -

Councillor Paul Watson, Dave Smith, Dr Ian Pattison, Ken Bremner and Chief Superintendent Kay Blyth.

Also Present:

Sunderland City Council

Chris Alexander
Abdul Amin
Fiona Brown
Charlotte Burnham
Graham Burt
Alan Caddick
Zoe Channing

Julie Charles
Colin Clark
Michelle Coates
Pippa Corner
Nigel Cummings
Colin Curtis
Paul Davies
Stuart Douglass

Steve Kell
Allison Kirby
Helen Lancaster
Anthony Longford
Jessica May
Keith Moore
James Newell

Allison Patterson
Jane Peverley
Stephen Pickering
Mike Poulter
John Rawling
Sarah Reed
Neil Revely
Ian Richardson

Diane Downey
Philip Foster
Mike Foster
Victoria French
Dan Hattle
Matthew Hunt
Matthew Jackson
Janet Johnson
Norma Johnson

Andrew Seekings
Julie Smith
Liz St. Louis
Lee Stoddart
Vince Taylor
Elaine Waugh
Jane Wheeler
Julie Wilkie
Ian Williams

Representatives of the Following External Organisations: -

Groundwork North East
Northumbria Police x 2
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust x 2
Gentoo Group x 4
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue
Hetton Town Council
Youth Parliament x 5
Age Uk
Sunderland Carers Centre x 2
City of Sunderland College x 2
Ashmore Consulting x 2
Church of England
Leighton Group x 2
Collinson Jewellers
University of Sunderland x 3
Sunderland Software City
Nexus
City Hospitals
Durham Cathedral
City Equals Group x 2
Sunderland Minster
Representatives of Community Spirit

And also Members of the Public

Notice

The Notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

Welcome by the Mayor

The Mayor, Councillor I Kay, welcomed those present to the City Council's eleventh Annual State of the City Event. He welcomed all guests, Council Members, partners and members of the public and then briefly outlined the programme for the debate.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bonallie, Forbes, Lauchlan, Maddison, Marshall, Padgett, Rolph, Scaplehorn, Stewart, Walker, Waller, N. Wright

Leader's Introductory Speech

The Leader welcomed everyone to the event. He advised that the fundamental role of Councillors was to listen to what residents had to say and to work to understand the needs, concerns, aspirations and priorities of residents and to feed the information into the Council and city decision making processes.

He highlighted some of the achievements over the last year including:

- Sunderland City Council being crowned the UK's best achieving Council at the Municipal Journal Awards
- In July Sunderland was the first port of call for The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh on their visit to the North East
- The Olympic Torch came to Sunderland in June and the first marathon of the north was held in the City in May. The marathon was such a success that it will be held again in 2013
- The funding bid to the government for the new bridge across the River Wear had been successful which would give a huge boost to the economic regeneration plans
- Businesses in the city had continued to flourish despite the tough trading conditions. Nissan had reached record production and staffing levels and had opened a new battery plant. Several other companies were building and opening new factories.
- A significant number of businesses in the city had received both regional and national awards
- In partnership with IBM the Council had introduced Cloud technology to the city and in partnership with BT over 90 percent of households had been given the ability to access superfast broadband
- There had been a Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board established by the Council which would oversee improvements in health in the coming years.
- The friendship agreement with Washington DC had been renewed

There had been State of the Area events held which had allowed residents to hear about the work of the Area Committees and to ask questions and raise issues specific to their local area. The Leader advised that he had attended each of the events and welcomed the opportunity to hear how the priorities differed from area to area. There had been very positive feedback from the events and residents had stated that they had felt more informed about what was happening in their area and had welcomed the opportunity to ask questions of officers and members. There had been some common issues across all of the areas such as parking which would be looked at on a "whole city" basis. It was recognised that each area was different and over the last year there had been further development of the Area Committees and the continued development of Responsive Local Services, especially for

environmental services. Residents had said that services were much more tailored to the needs of their neighbourhoods and standards and response times were excellent.

The Council had faced challenges recently; the budget had been reduced by £100million over the financial years from 2010 to 2013 and this had been done without the devastating effects of mass redundancies or declining services. The same reductions would be faced over the next 3 years. Partners such as the Police and NHS had also faced budget cuts and there were huge funding challenges for the voluntary and community sector. The Council was doing the right thing for the city and continuing to do more with fewer resources rather than making wholesale cuts to services. This was an increasingly difficult task as the financial pressures were going to last longer than expected. The potential to redesign and improve services for customers had been embraced.

At a recent meeting residents had stated that the officers were more responsive than ever and that this was the Council working at its best. The results of the residents' satisfaction surveys had also been very encouraging.

The recently launched "Make It Sunderland" initiative promoted the city as being the easiest place in the UK to do business and underlined the fact that the Council was being proactive in promoting business in the city. The Economic Masterplan was being updated to guide the rebalancing of the local economy further towards private sector led growth. This was bringing about significant opportunity but it was unfortunate that unemployment was likely to increase before reducing.

It was known that the welfare reforms would have an impact on a significant number of people and that in many households it would be incredibly difficult to cope with the difference in income. The Council was doing everything it could and was working with voluntary and community based organisations to help people understand the impacts and what help and support they would have available to them.

There was no doubt that the challenges were mounting; the approaches so far had seen a saving of £100million however more of the same would not enable the council to deal with the required future reductions. Significant work was ongoing within the Council to shape the organisation, its services and its workforce in a way that would help to deal with the financial pressures. In order to do this it was important to have an understanding of residents' needs and events like this were important for that purpose.

The achievements and progress made over the last year had only been possible because of the council and its partners working together towards a better future for Sunderland.

Recent meetings of the City Centre Traders' Association and Millfield Residents' Association had shown the sense of purpose, determination and passion within communities. The city had a world renowned reputation for its community spirit and the resilience of its people.

State of the City Event

The debate was facilitated by Richard Moss, Political Editor, BBC North East and Cumbria. Richard welcomed those present and advised that the Panel for the evening comprised: -

Councillor Paul Watson (Leader of Sunderland City Council), Dave Smith (Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council), Ken Bremner (Chair, Sunderland LSP), Dr Ian Pattison (Chairman, Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group) and Chief Superintendent Kay Blyth (Northumbria Police).

Richard advised that questions had been submitted to the "Your City, Your Say" State of City Event website and facebook page and the three most popular had been selected and would be answered prior to the open debate: -

Q1 There are several fantastic leisure centres across the city but none compare to Crowtree Leisure Centre with the pool and slides and ice rink. Are there plans for anything similar in the future?

Dave Smith responded by stating that the Council had invested heavily in leisure facilities in the city; since 2004 there had been £60m invested in modern sport and leisure facilities. It was a key aim of the Council to encourage residents to improve their health and wellbeing by being physically active; each of the five regeneration areas of the city had a public 25m swimming pool, a sports hall and a wellness centre. The city had the region's only Olympic sized swimming pool and there were two new pools at Hetton and Silksworth. Football pitches and play areas across the city had been upgraded.

It did not make economic sense to upgrade Crowtree due to the major upgrades that would be required to make the aging facilities suitable for use; it would be very expensive to replace Crowtree with a new facility incorporating a leisure pool and ice rink and there would be significant ongoing costs from the operation of such a facility given the high energy usage, maintenance and staffing costs associated with these facilities.

He also stated that the site could provide an opportunity for future retail developments once the economy had improved. There would be a need to ensure that alternative provision for the services still at the leisure centre was provided.

Q2 What plans are in place to revitalise the city centre?

The Leader responded that the regeneration of the city centre was one of the five aims of the city's Economic Masterplan. The Council had funded improvement works on Athenaeum Street and Market Square and had supported a wide range of events including the concerts at the Stadium of Light and the Winter Festival. Despite the difficult economic climate, The Bridges was still continuing to trade well and there had been a number of new shops opened recently and work had begun on the construction of the new £15million extension which would include a new Primark store.

The Vaux site was now in public ownership and there had been short term improvements done on the site. There was the intention in the long term to realign

St Mary's Way to enable a public square to be created at the top of High Street West which would also help to make the Vaux site more attractive to potential investors in the future and would help to include the site within the city centre. The development of the Vaux site would help to improve the rest of the city centre as there would be an increase in the number of people working in the city centre who would then be able to shop within the city centre.

There were also private sector investments such as the new Travelodge and Premier Inn which were planned to be built at Hind Street and there was to be work with Nexus and Network Rail to improve the ground level part of Sunderland Station.

Q3 Will Sunderland build a credible large music venue?

The Chief Executive advised that in 2008 there had been a significant amount of work undertaken to understand whether Sunderland could claim the title of a Music City. One of the issues had been whether there was the need for a large scale indoor music venue; consultation with musicians had identified that there was a need for smaller venues such as pubs with a capacity of around 100 people and slightly larger venues such as North Shore which could accommodate around 1000 people. There were already a large number of venues within the city which could cater for audiences of this size.

At the other end of the scale there was the Stadium of Light which had a capacity of up to 55,000 people for music events. There was also Herrington Country Park which could accommodate music events of varying sizes.

The Council was keen to encourage musicians and promoters to use the existing venues in the city. The issue of whether a larger indoor music venue could be built was being explored.

Open Debate

Richard Moss invited questions from the floor.

Q1 It was said that Crowtree Leisure Centre would not be economically viable to reopen. A Freedom of Information request had shown that there had not been any assessment of the refurbishment costs in recent years. How can it be said that it would not be economically viable when no assessments had been carried out?

The Leader replied that usage had been monitored and it had been shown that the centre was declining in popularity and would not be able to pay its own way. The centre was located on a prime city centre site which could be better used for retail and business use. The facilities provided by the centre were now available in each area of the city. Even if the centre was refurbished it would still be in the wrong location.

Q2 It was felt that the Council and Councillors did not treat disability discrimination as being serious. The Council provided for Gay Pride Parades but did not do anything for disability awareness. A lot of disabled people were victims of harassment however nothing was done to support the victims.

The Chief Executive stated that the Council provided support for disabled people and worked closely with organisations and groups which represented and supported disabled people. There was a need to look at how disability awareness could be promoted. The Council had a clear aim to prevent harassment from occurring.

Neil Revely, Executive Director of Health, Housing & Adult Services, advised that there had been investment across the city to ensure that everywhere was disabled friendly and the new Contact Centre on Fawcett Street had been designed to include facilities for those with severe disabilities. If the work being done was not visible enough then there would be a need to address this.

Chief Superintendent Kay Blyth stated that this was a serious issue and that training would be provided for officers and staff to ensure that they were aware of the issues faced by those with disabilities. Work was being done in partnership with the independent advisory groups. It was acknowledged that people often felt anxious about reporting crimes and as such there were proposals to set up places away from police stations where people would be able to go to report crimes. There was a need to look at how support could be provided to people who were victimised.

Q3 The Council wanted more people to visit the City Centre however there were not enough shops for older people. There was a large population of older people in the city and they often had a large disposable income however as there was a lack of choice in the city centre they would often go to Newcastle to do their shopping. There was also a need for more late night shopping; after 5:30pm The Bridges was closed.

Ken Bremner agreed that there was a need to improve the retail provision in the city centre and to ensure that the retail provision was tailored to the residents of the city.

Dave Smith stated that retailers did their own analysis before opening stores. Work needed to be done with private sector partners to try and attract retailers to the city. There was a need to encourage diversity as a wider range of shops would lead to more shoppers coming into the city centre.

The Leader stated that there was an appetite for late night shopping among retailers. The traders were working together with support from the Council and the City Centre Traders' Association to develop ways to increase footfall into the city centre. The redevelopment of the Vaux site would bring more people into the city centre to work and would increase the viability of the city centre as the increased number of workers would then spend money shopping in the city centre.

Q4 Were there any plans for toilets to be installed during the refurbishment of the train station concourse? Would the farmers' market be taking place again?

The Leader advised that the Council wanted toilets to be installed in the station however as it was not Council property it was not possible to force Nexus to install toilets. The farmers' markets had been a series of one off events; as they had been so successful the possibility of having them as a permanent fixture was being examined.

Q5 Why wasn't Sunderland Council helping small businesses and entrepreneurs when other authorities such as Gateshead Council were?

The Chief Executive stated that it was recognised that there was a need for everyone to do more to support businesses. The council did an enormous amount of work to help small businesses. There had been a range of grants; advice and support provided to small businesses to help them prosper in the city centre. The council worked with partner organisations such as the Business Investment Centre to help provide support to sustain businesses.

The Evolve Centre had been built to provide low cost offices for entrepreneurs and to provide advice; the centre was extremely popular and all of the offices were full. The Software City had been built to provide more offices of this type. The university had 'hatcheries' to help graduates to set up their own businesses and the council had been operating the 'Be your own boss' scheme which had helped 420 residents to start their own businesses in the last 18 months.

Q6 Residents wanted to be proud of Sunderland. Apart from the Winter Gardens and Glass Centre there were very few attractions in the city for visitors which leads to visitors going, instead, to South Shields or Newcastle.

Ken Bremner suggested taking advantage of the city's beaches.

The Leader stated that there was a lot to be proud of. Regardless of how many attractions there were there would never be enough; there were already a lot of attractions and it would be good if there were more however there would be cost implications of developing new attractions. There was a need to have a balance of indoor and outdoor provision. There were a number of events such as the Air Show which attracted people to the city from across the region.

Q7 It was rumoured that Marks and Spencers was looking to move to the Crowtree Leisure Centre site. Were there any plans for a leisure centre on the sea front? Why were there Council run cafés in Herrington Country Park and Barnes Park but not on the sea front?

The Leader stated that he was not aware of any plans for Marks and Spencers to be moving. A seafront leisure centre would be a good idea; the Council now owned the Pullman Lodge and, as such, owned a large stretch of land along the sea front, when the economy picked up it would be worth investigating the feasibility of a leisure centre. The cafés in the parks were run by Social Services and were operated day to day by people with disabilities. If there was a desire for a café on the sea front then the feasibility of this would be investigated.

Q8 Crowtree Leisure Centre would have been an asset to the city centre. The pool at the Aquatic Centre was not suitable for children.

The Leader advised that the Aquatic Centre had been built for training for athletes and grants had been received for the building of it. There was, however, a movable floor to make the pool suitable for all ages.

Q9 The Council was doing a lot of work to make the city more attractive. There was a need to ensure that proactive work was done to make the city more accessible for people in wheelchairs.

Ken Bremner stated that this was an important issue however the cost implications of any works was always a problem.

Dave Smith added that it was a continuous challenge. When work was being done to rejuvenate the street scene work was also done to ensure that accessibility was improved.

Q10 Public transport costs for young people were too high. It cost £3 each way to travel between Sunderland and Washington. What support was given to students for travelling?

The Leader acknowledged that travel was a significant expense for young people and could be a barrier to people continuing in further education. Nexus was in charge of ensuring that there was sufficient bus provision and they agreed that fares were too high. Bus travel was a social necessity and Bridget Phillipson MP was carrying out work around increasing public influence in the running of bus services. Some routes made a profit while others did not; the profits should be used to subsidise the other routes to ensure that they were viable. Subsidised concessionary fares were expensive to provide.

Q11 What was the reason behind the hybrid development at Philadelphia? There were proposals for 630 houses when there were already houses in the area which were not selling. The 60 new jobs at the docks which had been mentioned were not new but were moving from the Philadelphia complex.

The Leader stated that the firm moving to the docks had been operating from Philadelphia while waiting for the premises at the docks to be ready; they were a marine company and needed to be located on the water front. In relation to the housing development he advised that anyone was able to submit a planning application and all applications were consulted on and considered against planning policies. All applications submitted needed to go through the planning process. Residents would be consulted in due course as part of the consultation on the application.

Q12 There was no bus stop near to the entrance of the Aquatic Centre where there was an appropriate place for a bus stop to be installed.

The Leader agreed to look into the feasibility of having a bus stop provided close to the Aquatic Centre.

Q13 All patients should have the right to autonomy and should be able to refuse treatment. Andrew Lansbury was trying to make it so that medical professionals could force people to have treatment. This would be terrible for patients.

Dr Ian Pattison stated that any patient who was of sound mind had the right to refuse treatment.

Q14 There had not been any changes on the sea front for a number of years. There used to be attractions such as the fair ground and illuminations which would have brought in visitors and revenue. South Shields sea front was much better than Sunderland's.

The Leader stated that South Shields had its own offer, for example the permanent fair ground. The last weekend had been sunny and Sunderland sea front had been extremely busy. Illuminations attracted people however it was difficult to raise any revenue as it would be necessary to get people out of their cars to spend money rather than just driving through. There was a need to learn from the previous good work that had been done. The Airshow did a fantastic job of attracting people to the sea front.

Ken Bremner added that the Council was doing a lot of work to redevelop the sea front however it was dependant on investment, the council was trying to get funding from the Coastal Communities Fund.

Q15 There was very little for ethnic minorities in the city and there was no leisure provision. There were also no facilities for the elderly. Other towns in the region made Sunderland seem very poor and made residents feel ashamed.

Dave Smith advised that the Council provided support to organisations to provide local facilities for their communities. The local organisations were best placed to know what their community needed. The Council was facing cutbacks however the money given to the Voluntary and Community Sector had not been reduced. Work was being done to bring additional resources into the city.

The Leader added that all residents were equal and should be given equal opportunity to access facilities. If any groups could not access facilities then the Council would do what it could to enable them to access the facilities. The Council did what it could to try to meet the needs of its residents.

Q16 The city was a great place however after 6pm the city centre felt like a ghost town.

The Leader stated that people working in the city centre left between 4 and 6 and then after that the ambience of the city centre changed as people started coming into town to enjoy the night life. The evening economy did not start to pick up until around 8pm. There was a need to encourage people into the city centre on evenings and there had been an evening economy strategy developed. The state of the economy and the lack of disposable income meant that fewer people were coming into the city centre. There was a need to make the city centre as attractive as possible using attractions such as illuminations or markets.

Q17 The football club and sea front were massive assets for the city. The coast to coast cycle route ended on the sea front and there were a lot of cyclists who arrived, had photos taken, and then got on the bus to leave; there was a need to have facilities to keep visitors on the sea front. The sea at Seaburn and Roker had larger waves than in Cornwall; it could be possible to promote surfing at the beach.

Ken Bremner stated that it sounded like there was a missed opportunity here. There needed to be ideas and concepts in place to sell the city.

The Leader referred to the Marine Activity Centre at Roker which carried out a lot of activities; unfortunately it was not the appropriate place for surfing as the waves were not suitable. Sailing and other activities were carried out at the sea front. There was a need to look at the end point of the Coast to Coast route to identify whether it would be possible to do any improvements to encourage cyclists to stop in the area. There used to be a permanent fair ground at Seaburn however it had not been financially viable, the showmen had agreed to set up for some peak weekends including the Easter weekend.

Close of the Event

As Chair of the debate, Richard Moss closed the open discussion and thanked all present for their attendance.

The Mayor stated that from the questions asked it was clear that residents had a pride and passion for Sunderland. He commented that he had recently been on HMS Ocean and the crew had stated that the people of Sunderland were as friendly and welcoming as people from any other city in the world.

He then moved, and it was agreed, that the content of the debate would be circulated to partner agencies and would be taken into account by the Leader of the Council in proposing the budget and policy framework to the Council for the coming year.

(Signed) I Kay,
Mayor.