

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on TUESDAY 9TH JANUARY 2024 at 4.30 p.m.

Present: -

Councillor Burrell in the Chair

Councillors, Dixon, Foster, Johnston, Leonard, O'Brien, Scanlan and Watson.

Also in attendance: -

James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, SCC

Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, SCC

Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration, SSC

Councillor Claire Rowntree, Deputy Leader of the Council and Clean, Green City Portfolio Holder, SCC

Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive, BID

Natasha McDonagh, Sunderland Chamber of Commerce

Rhiannon Bearne, Executive Director Policy and Representation, North East Chamber of Commerce

Marion Dixon, Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing Manager, SCC

Paul Muir, Transport Development Group Engineer, SCC

Anthony Bell, Road Safety Engineer, SCC

Members of the Press

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Fagan

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Committee held on 21st November 2023

A copy of the minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 21st November 2023 were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 21st November 2023 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record

Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Committee held on 5th December, 2023

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 5th December 2023 were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 5th December 2023 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Low Carbon Approach - Update

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) to set out the progress being made in relation to the Low Carbon Framework and reducing carbon emissions in the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration was in attendance along with Councillor Claire Rowntree, Deputy Leader of the Council and Clean, Green City Portfolio Holder, to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation.

Councillor Rowntree wished to thank Ms Auld and her team for all the work they did and commented that it was a mammoth task and they had a long journey ahead therefore she encouraged all Members to be active participants where they could.

In response to Councillor Dixons query over the issue of parents leaving car engines idling during school drop offs and enforcement, Ms Auld advised that they hoped to work with their young people to change the attitudes of how students travelled to school and they would take away the findings of the Safer Streets pilot in Washington and see what they could come back with.

Paul Muir, Transport Development Group Engineer also advised that there was a great deal of parking campaigns around schools and they were looking to extend these and they were also working with Environmental Health about air quality around schools.

Councillor O'Brien referred to the Council's own carbon reductions and suggested that the Council Tax statements that were currently sent out by post should be sent via email as an alternative and queried if there were any plans to implement this. Ms Auld advised that there was currently no opt in scheme for this as there needed to be a balance that everyone had access to information and not all residents would have digital accessibility but it was a good point to consider.

In relation to Councillor O'Brien's query over how much Carbon reduction was achieved by cancelling the Airshow, Ms Auld advised that she would refer Members to the answers provided during Questions to Council previously.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked Ms Auld and Councillor Rowntree for their attendance. it was then:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Business Improvement District (BID) – Annual Update

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with a progress report on the work of the Sunderland Business Improvement District (BID) and to provide an update on the economic challenges and opportunities facing the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive, BID, Natasha McDonagh, Sunderland Chamber of Commerce, Rhiannon Bearne, North East Chamber of Commerce and Marion Dixon, Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing Manager, Sunderland City Council were in attendance to present the report along with PowerPoint presentations and to answer any Members queries.

Councillor S. Johnston commented that historically there had always been a marquee event taking place at the seafront whether it be the airshow or as last year, the Triathlon, and this year would be the first year that there would be none. Ms Dixon commented that there was a need to market our spaces and the seafront was one of our great assets and it was on the agenda to have those conversations.

Councillor Foster wished to congratulate Ms Appleby and the BID on their successful election result for another 5 years. Councillor Foster also wished to praise the excellent video shown to the Committee but felt that such productions weren't shown enough and the public didn't get to see the work that was being done and this needed to change.

Councillor Foster also added that whilst he did try and promote the bowls offer within the City, the main comments he received were on the lack of leisure options and that he felt we were missing a trick in this regard. Ms Appleby agreed that there were always comments around Communications despite everything that they did and sometimes it was just about what people wanted to read and what they didn't, but they could always improve on Communications.

Ms Appleby added that things were always changing with the algorithms on Facebook for instance and as a positive she had found that residents were starting to challenge each other on social media and posting the positive aspects and not just the negative opinions. It was good to see residents encouraging and engaging with one another.

Ms Appleby agreed with Councillor Foster that we needed a blend in terms of Leisure and there were some really interesting discussions ongoing to bring more Leisure into the City which it was hoped would be more permanent provision rather than single events.

Councillor Dixon thanked Officers for providing a very important report and enquired if the increased Police presence had made any difference to the confidence of City Centre Businesses. Ms Appleby advised that they met regularly with the businesses and the increased police presence had definitely made a difference as this used to be top of their agenda previously and this was not the case now. The businesses

were appreciative of the extra resources such as the Wardens and it was not just about a physical presence but the intelligence sharing also.

Councillor Dixon referred to the recent work done by the Committee looking at the Sunnyside area in which it was found that the businesses there weren't really working well together in terms of coordinating opening times etc and enquired if there had been any change over this. Ms Appleby advised that with new businesses coming in and opening up for longer hours this had helped and issues in the area were reducing. The Sunnyside Masterplan would also have an effect and would encourage more activity.

In response to Councillor Dixon enquiring as to the University Students use of the City Centre and if this was getting any better, Ms Appleby commented that it was acknowledged on both sides that the offer needed to improve and we were starting to see more students coming into the City Centre with the introduction of more student accommodation but we needed more of this so it was not a sea change but was improving.

Councillor Dixon commented that there had been an influx of people from West Africa in recent years and enquired if any contact had been made with those about starting businesses. Ms Appleby advised that there was an issue with the visas from West Africa in which they did not allow the setting up of businesses but they were starting to have greater conversations with the student unions.

Ms McDonough informed that there hadn't been anyone from West Africa attend their meetings. Councillor Dixon suggested that there may be some potential there.

Councillor Dixon also queried as to the impact that Brexit, now that it had happened, has had on businesses in Sunderland and the North East. Ms McDonough advised that the frustrations raised now mostly relate to cost of living and inflation pressures.

Ms Bearne commented that it had been an incredibly challenging period with the changes brought about by Brexit and then going into the Pandemic but there was greater stability now and businesses were gaining a greater awareness of customs requirements and such like. They were finding that some businesses were working well with this and some weren't and it depended upon the type of businesses so the responsibility was upon the Chamber of Commerce to find out what those issues were.

Councillor Dixon also wished to thank Ms Dixon and her team for their work on Events during the years which he had attended and found to be excellent.

Councillor O'Brien commented that as a Ward Councillor of a suburban Ward he was glad to see there would be a budget for more local events and he was keen to hear how engagement with local groups would take place, suggesting that groups such as Royalty Theatre for Shakespeare in the Park would be interesting for example.

Ms Dixon advised that they would be working with the Area Committees on this to build in a process to engage with groups and it was about having events that could become sustainable and reoccurring to be a catalyst for Sunderland. Ms Dixon also advised that she would obtain the data on footfall from What's on Sunderland as per Councillor O'Brien's request.

Councillor Foster commented that students used to have a dedicated week in which they used to get involved with businesses and this had been popular but we seemed to let that go. Ms Appleby advised that she was not sure that happened anywhere in the country now but they did do freshers week and the new executive of the students union was engaging with them much more effectively.

Ms Appleby advised that students were involved in the Halloween Parade for instance and they were really keen to do something around Nigeria Day and looking at Fashion and Beauty leading up to the launch of Culture House.

Councillor O'Brien referred to Freshers Week and commented that there was a need for more events and to be coordinated with restaurant week for example to give students more of a reason to stay in the City.

Ms Appleby commented that this was a valid point and they had coordinated Freshers with restaurant week and they were also doing another restaurant week in March when the businesses had requested it be held but there was a need to hold more promotions.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked the representatives for their attendance and for a really positive report

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

Road Safety Annual Report 2022

The Assistant Director Transport and Infrastructure submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update on road safety issues in the City and consider the Road Safety Annual Report 2022

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Paul Muir, Transport Development Group Engineer and Anthony Bell, Road Safety Engineer, were in attendance to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation and to respond to any Members queries.

In response to Councillor Foster's query over the Little People signage, Mr Muir advised that these were erected by Council staff as they were used on the Public Highways and therefore the liability would be with the Council.

Councillor Scanlan referred to the Child Pedestrian Training and commented that she was pleased to hear this being undertaken as they appeared to be very poor education in this regard, especially around those attending Thornhill School.

Mr Muir advised that they do target secondary schools with more hard hitting education programmes but they needed the schools to be engaged for this.

In response to Councillor Scanlan's queries, Mr Muir advised that the Speed Cameras were managed through a partnership with the Police and there was a need to get these up and running again. It was to be considered by Cabinet in the next couple of months and then they would start the procurement process. In relation to the School Crossing Patrols and where people could apply for the posts, these were an open advert on the Jobs North East website.

The Chairman commented that the website was quite bureaucratic and not the easiest to use. Mr Muir acknowledged the website may not be the friendliest to use but they were trying to help any candidates that came forward.

In regards to Councillor Leonards query over the crossing patrols and how to reassess the issue that Venerable Bede School had lost theirs, Mr Bell advised that it was still an active post but they just hadn't had any interest as of yet for the role.

Councillor Dixon referred to the school streets pilot and enquired as to when this would possibly be moved into other streets. Mr Muir informed that this was initially tried in Washington as they had funded the pilot, Officers had bid for and secured funding to look at other sites and the road safety design team were in the process of identifying those locations so that it was then about engaging and getting the schools on board.

In relation to the inconsiderate parking signage, Councillor Dixon enquired if this were expensive to be purchased and suggested that it may be a good use of Community Chest funding at Area Committee. Mr Muir advised that the signs were in the hundreds and not thousands of pounds to purchase so they were a worthwhile investment.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked Mr Muir and Mr Bell for the report. it was then:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2023-24

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), which set out the current work programme for the Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Member's information and possible discussion.

Councillor Dixon enquired if the Software Centres item would be brought before the Committee. Mr Diamond advised that it was still on the work programme and he was awaiting confirmation of the date it would be scheduled for.

5. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 20th December, 2023 (copies circulated).

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

Mr Diamond reminded Members to get in touch if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

6. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

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

(Signed) M. BURRELL,
Chairman.