

END OF YEAR REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE 2008/9

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1 Why has the report come to the Committee

- 1.1 The report sets out to review the operation and achievements of the Review Committee over the last year.

2 Background

- 2.1 In June 2008, the members of the Review Committee agreed their annual work programme for the municipal year 2008/09. The Work Programme brought together the issues raised by members as the major priorities and challenges facing the city for the year ahead.
- 2.2 In drawing up the work programme, every effort was made to retain a degree of flexibility in the workload in order to allow the Committee to deal with issues of immediate concern.

3 Operation of the Review Committee

- 3.1 The Review Committee has covered a lot of ground during the year and considered around forty separate items.
- 3.2 Nevertheless, in setting its work programme, we have tried to build on the work of the Committee during 2007/08, focusing on a number of key themes that remain a priority for the city. These include traffic issues, waste management and public transport. The Committee has also been consulted on a range of issues in order to provide its advice and guidance to Cabinet.
- 3.3 The major issues considered by the Committee are set out below:-

Traffic Issues

- 3.4 A major priority of the Committee has been to look in detail at some of the major traffic issues facing the city and try to identify any improvements and solutions.
- 3.5 To this end, the Committee established a cross party Task and Finish Group on Traffic Issues. The Group was chaired by Councillor Colin Wakefield and their work focused on the traffic problems being experienced by residents around Doxford Park International Business Park and the Royal Hospital.
- 3.6 The Group brought forward made a number of concrete proposals and recommendations for improving the parking situation in both areas which were

approved by the Committee on 20 April 2009 and by the Cabinet on 3 June 2009.

- 3.7 While recognising the complex nature of the problems being faced and the need to balance the often competing interests involved, the report stressed that the Council must act in order to improve the quality of life of residents. It therefore recommended a combination of short term measures to address the immediate problems facing residents and also longer term measures to remedy the more deep seated issues.
- 3.8 At Doxford International Business Park, the report recommended a review of waiting restrictions in the Business Park and where possible their reduction in order to free up available parking space. It also suggested that a clearway should be introduced to ensure the free flow of traffic along City Way and part of Doxford Park Way. The Committee also considered that businesses on the Park should cooperate to make the most of available parking spaces and that they should seek to follow the example of EDF Energy by introducing a comprehensive new car sharing scheme.
- 3.9 In terms of the Royal Hospital, the report suggested a mix of long term and short term solutions though we do feel that the parking problems are, if anything, more complicated than those being experienced at Doxford International.
- 3.10 The report suggested a range of solutions including expanding the existing park and ride scheme to further areas of the city, considering additional car parking spaces through the transfer of auxiliary services away from the hospital. It also referred to the inherent limitations of the existing site in terms of expansion and the implications for its location. In all of these considerations however, we feel that the key is to build up a constructive and on going dialogue with the Hospital in order to make lasting progress.
- 3.11 In terms of general traffic management, the Review Committee continued to monitor the overall progress being made in implementing the recommendations of the review of parking enforcement undertaken by RTA Associates and in the development of parking services generally.
- 3.12 With regard to the formulation of the Speed Management Strategy for the city, the Review Committee was consulted on the review of existing 40mph speed limits within the city. Members made a number of suggestions and provided advice based on their detailed knowledge of the conditions and needs of local areas.

Public Transport and Local Bus Services

- 3.13 During the year, the Committee examined the provision of public transport and the adequacy of local bus services in the city. In this, we were greatly assisted by representatives from Nexus including Mr Bernard Garner and Mr Tobyn Hughes.

- 3.14 The new Local Transport Act 2008 should provide Nexus with the tools to improve bus services within Sunderland and Tyne and Wear in general. At the start of the year, the Committee invited representatives from Go-Ahead and Stagecoach in order to discuss the future development of partnership working and the best means of improving the quality of bus services in the city.
- 3.15 In doing so, the Committee was responding to public concern over the cost and adequacy of local bus services – in particular services to outlying areas.
- 3.16 Nexus is still developing its proposals and we feel that it is important for the Committee to continue to monitor the situation in the coming year. We hope that the Review Committee will continue to make an important contribution in the year ahead, though it is recognised that the Committee's ability to influence the bus companies is limited.
- 3.17 The Committee also examined the proposals for the reopening of the Leamside Line. Again, the Committee was assisted by Nexus and representatives from Network Rail.
- 3.18 We consider the Leamside Line as a key issue for the city with the potential to reduce congestion, improve transport linkages both within the city and with the Tees Valley and help to promote the economic prosperity. The Committee will continue to monitor the progress being made and will continue pressing for the scheme to be brought forward to the earliest possible date. We feel that schemes such as the Leamside Line, together with improvements to the Metro system are vital to the future economic and social prosperity of the city.
- 3.19 The Committee also received an update on the delivery of the Local Transport Plan 2 Delivery Plan. Our thanks go to Councillor James Blackburn, Portfolio holder for Transport and Chairman of the Tyne and Wear Joint Lead Members (Transport) for attending the Committee to outline the measures being taken to improve transport provision locally and regionally. Among the most notable developments are the proposals in place for the new Wear Bridge, the development of the Southern Radial Route and the improvements to Sunderland Railway Station.

Waste Management Strategy

- 3.20 The Review Committee has received several monitoring reports on the progress being made on the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. The Strategy has been developed in conjunction with Gateshead and South Tyneside Councils.
- 3.21 During the year, members from each of the authorities, including the Chairman of the Review Committee, have visited number of sites to view at first hand the options available for waste management in the future. The Strategy will have a significant long term impact on the future of waste management in the city and we feel that it is important for the Committee to continue to monitor the progress being made in the coming year.

Performance Monitoring

- 3.22 The quarterly performance management reports received by the Committee provide an important opportunity for members to monitor the progress being made by the Council in meeting its key target and objectives.
- 3.23 Regular performance monitoring report can help to highlight any potential areas of risk or underperformance and provide an opportunity for members to get behind the figures and assess the delivery of services to the public.
- 3.24 To this end, the Committee has asked for and recommended further information on the progress and adequacy of public footpaths within the city and the performance of the Council in terms of graffiti and flytipping.
- 3.25 The Committee has also regularly monitored the progress being made by the Executive in implanting its recommendations from earlier policy reviews. The Committee has therefore received update reports on the Climate Change Action Plan, the development of cycling within the city and the improvement of public realm and streetscene.

Cabinet Consultation

- 3.26 The Review Committee has an important role in contributing to the development of policy within the Council. During the year we have tried to further develop this role so members can have input at an earlier stage in the policy making process.
- 3.27 The Committee has been consulted on a number of major planning documents with our views and advice being reported to Cabinet. These include:-
- Regional Spatial Strategy.
 - Central Area Urban Design Strategy
 - Local Development Framework: Housing Allocation Development Plan
 - Design Supplementary Planning Document
 - Castletown Masterplan
 - Washington Village Conservation Area
 - Newbottle Conservation Area.
 - Sunnyside Planning and design Framework

Member Items

- 3.28 Scrutiny in Sunderland is a member led process. In addition to setting the work programme at the beginning of the year, members of the Review Committee may request that additional items be included on agenda. This can be done through a number of means as set out in the Council Constitution and the Review Committee protocols.
- 3.29 During the year, members requested that the following items be added to the agenda:-

- Operation of the Kerb It Scheme – (twice)
- Planning Consents, Biddick Woods
- System for Residential Planning Applications

3.30 Each of these requests were approved by the Committee and have subsequently been the subject of a detailed report.

Conclusion

3.31 The Review Committee has covered a lot of ground during the year and made a lot of positive progress. However, we do see our work as part of an ongoing process and in a number of the priority areas, such as public transport, parking issues and waste management, further work will need to be done in the year ahead.

3.32 The importance of partnership working has also been apparent during the year and the Committee looks forward to developing our relationship with partners such as Nexus, Network Rail, Aurora and the City Hospital. We feel that long term change will be best achieved through cooperation and joint working.

3.33 In the coming year, the Review Committee will be also seeking to better balance its workload to avoid any peaks or troughs through the year in fulfilling its work programme.

4 Recommendation

4.1 That the end of year report into the operation of the Environmental and Planning Review Committee be approved.

Background Papers

CPA Action Plan
City of Sunderland Corporate Assessment

Contact Officer : Jim Diamond
0191 553 1396

james.diamond@sunderland.gov.uk