

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 19TH OCTOBER, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors M. Dixon, Errington, Essl, Foster, Kay, Maddison, McClennan, Rolph and A. Wilson.

Also Present:-

Councillor D. Wilson - Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor I. Richardson.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 21st September, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st September, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record subject to 'Mr. Craddock' on page 4, paragraph 5 being amended to read 'Mr. Caddick'.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

Response from Cabinet – 24th June, 2010 – Policy Review – Local Studies Provision in Sunderland

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 24th June, 2010 where consideration was given to the Committee's policy review into Local Studies in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that Cabinet had approved the recommendations from the review in their entirety and the Committee's attention was drawn to Appendix A which provided an action plan in respect of each recommendation.

Councillor D. Wilson, Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture, presented the feedback in relation to the Action Plan and addressed comments and questions from Members, supported by Vicki Medhurst, Principal Librarian, Library Development and Information.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Councillor Wilson advised that the Local Studies Manager had now been appointed and provided Members with details of the successful applicant's background.

With regard to the development of further links and partnership working Councillor Rolph suggested that this should include the University Archives, Beamish Museum, the Coalfield Area Committee Task and Finish Group, Local and Regional Records Offices together with friends groups such as the Friends of Rectory Park.

Councillor Errington endorsed the Beamish Archives as a fantastic source of information. Councillor D. Wilson confirmed that local studies were very important to people and commended the work being done in Washington in this regard.

Councillor A. Wilson referred to recommendation No. 10 and asked how the Friends of the Local Studies Group was to be promoted. Ms. Medhurst advised that this would be done via the press and usual PR. The service had already spoken to the Sunderland Heritage Forum and were looking at ways to engage with people who did not currently use the service.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor McClennan as to how young people could become involved, Councillor D. Wilson stated that the Hylton Castle battle re-enactment had been a great success for young people and had created a demand for local studies. The East End Heritage Group was doing a tremendous job in encouraging young people and had raised money and employed a person to develop this work. A grant from Young Roots had also been awarded to engage young people in archaeology within the East End. In addition Ms. Medhurst advised that the role of the Local Studies Manager would very much include out reach work to engage with young people. Events of interest to young people would be promoted via the library service. In conclusion, Councillor D. Wilson advised that whatever provision was made for young people the one thing it should not be seen to be was 'boring'.

The Chairman having thanked Councillor Wilson and Ms. Medhurst for their attendance, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report and information provided be received and noted.

Role of Culture in Supporting Sustainable Communities 2010

The Chief Executive and Executive Director of City Services submitted a report which outlined the background position with regard to the Committee's policy review into the role of culture in supporting Sustainable Communities and which set out details of the evidence gathering process.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report which highlighted the previously agreed terms of reference, provided definitions of Culture and Sustainable Communities and Culture, together with an overview of the components of the current cultural offer in Sunderland.

Members were advised that during the course of the review, each of the service areas would be asked to present detailed evidence in support of their work in order to better understand the role of culture in supporting sustainable communities, reinforcing cultural identity and combating social exclusion. Examples of good practice would be highlighted both from within the Council and from other local authorities.

Evidence could also be sought from a range of external partners including Sport England, English Heritage, Arts Council England, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, the University of Sunderland and some of the relevant Voluntary and Community Sector groups in the City.

The Chairman referred to the minutes of the last meeting and advised that to date no nominations had been received for the Task and Finish Groups. Councillors Rolph and Errington volunteered to sit on the Groups however Councillor Rolph reiterated her request that meetings were arranged for the evening to make it easier for Members to attend.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Diamond advised that a detailed report on heritage would be submitted to the Committee as part of the review.

Councillor McClennan advised that she represented the Ward with the highest percentage of BME residents in the City. She asked therefore that as part of the review, evidence was also sought from the BME network and Voluntary Sector Network.

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

3. RESOLVED that:-
 - i) the report be received and noted; and
 - ii) Councillors Rolph and Errington be nominated to serve on the Policy Review Task and Finish Group.

Play and Urban Games Review

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented an addendum to the Play and Urban Games Strategy (PUGS) and also highlighted the Council's achievements to date with regard to the six objectives contained within the PUGS.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Carol Lewis, Play Pathfinder Programme Manager, presented the report and highlighted the key achievements to date in each of the following six objectives:-

- i) ensure play is strategically planned and resourced in partnership;
- ii) involve children and young people in the development of their play opportunities and services;
- iii) work in partnership to develop, support and promote high standards for play;
- iv) create, improve and develop free and inclusive play spaces;
- v) seek greater innovation in the development of sustainable play opportunities;
- vi) ensure that in partnership, the City monitors and evaluates the impact of play developments citywide to deliver this Strategy.

Members were informed that since the PUGS was produced in 2007 and endorsed by Cabinet, substantial progress had been made, primarily due to the success in achieving Play Pathfinder status. This had amounted to a £2.1 million capital investment accompanied by revenue support. The award has resulted in an 18 month play transformation programme and subsequently, the over achievement against key actions identified within the PUGS in 2007, necessitating an update to the Strategy. This addendum was appended as an appendix to the report for Members' comment.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Errington regarding Action 18 in Appendix 4 of the plan, Ms. Lewis confirmed that the Burdon Lane and Cherry Knowle site bordered on the Doxford Ward.

Councillor Foster referred to 106 Agreements and believed that Ward Councillors should have the final say with regard to where the resulting funding was spent.

Councillor Kay expressed surprise that street play comprised such a tiny element of the PUGS and that it appeared mobile provision for play and youth work had been overlooked. He applauded the notion that play was free at the point of delivery but hoped there was confidence that this could be maintained given the current economic climate.

Councillor Rolph stated that she had been extremely impressed with the way City Services had delivered the Pathfinder, however, because of the tight timescale there had been residual issues. For example, the equipment at the Rectory Playing Field had been removed and had yet to be replaced. With regard to paragraph 5 in relation to the National, Regional and Local context she noted that fig 2 made no reference to Scrutiny. There was also no mention of the 'Planning for Play' policy review document produced by the former Culture and Leisure Review Committee during 2002-2003. With regard to the SWOT Analysis detailed in paragraph 7 of the PUGS, Councillor Rolph noted that no mention had been made of increased traffic volumes. In conclusion she also referred to the Action Plan and stated that it appeared not to have been updated following the consultation at the Coalfield Area Committee.

The Chairman having complimented Ms. Lewis on the clarity of the report's narrative it was:-

4. RESOLVED the report be received and noted.

Economic Viability of Affordable Housing Requirements

The Deputy Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services, submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of the findings of a study into the economic viability of securing affordable housing in the City which would form part of the evidence base of the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Neil Cole, Manager Planning Policy, presented the report and addressed comments and questions from Members.

Councillor McClennan referred to the announcement earlier that day of Government Plans to cut funding for social housing by 50% and asked Mr. Cole for his comments.

Mr. Cole replied that it was too early to comment at this stage as he had not heard the announcement. He advised that there was the potential for a knock on effect. It had been widely anticipated that the intention of the Government was to increase rents towards the market end of the spectrum. He did not believe that it would negate the findings of the report as it already recognised that any Government funding would be limited.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kay, Mr. Cole advised that a lot of the target figure of 388 homes would be subsumed by Gentoo. When viability was being assessed the Authority had pulled together 13 brown field sites each at various stages of development. Mr. Cole advised that it was the intention of his service to work closely with Land and Property to help kick start development.

Councillor Dixon stated that a lot of sites had remained vacant for many years, for example, in areas such as Pennywell, Pallion and Hendon. This has been the case even during the time of the housing market boom and he asked whether developers had shown any enthusiasm more recently. Mr. Cole advised that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment had been informed by the private sector, registered social landlords and land owners. It was not in dispute that planning applications had declined, however, on the positive side the private sector appeared to be gearing up for the signs of green shoots and the number of pre application discussions was on the increase.

Councillor Rolph referred to the impact the decrease in Government funding for social housing would have for Gentoo both in relation to their ability to build homes and the incentive to fall back on rent rises. There was also the tension between the Council and developers with the Council promoting brown field site development when this was not where private sector firms wished to build. Councillor Rolph also suggested that perhaps the Council could consider looking at small sale partnership exercises with developers and expressed surprise that only five consultation responses had been received with regard to the study.

In conclusion, with regard to the lack of site development the Chairman suggested that the timescales involved in the planning process were off putting for many developers and believed that consideration should be given to devising a fast tracking system.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Cole for his attendance, it was:-

5. RESOVLED that the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st October, 2010 – 31st January, 2011

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 October, 2010 – 31st January, 2011 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Kay asked that if it was thought there was value in doing so, that item 01454 (Partnership Volunteering Strategy) was brought to the Committee.

Councillor Rolph asked that the Committee was also able to comment on the sustainable aspects of the Waste Management PFI item.

6. RESOLVED that the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

Work Programme 2010-11

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2010-11 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Rolph having commended Mr. Caddick and his team for their pledge to bring housing issues to the Committee for comment prior to Cabinet submission, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the Committee's Work programme for 2010-11 be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.