

At a meeting of the PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mordey in the Chair

Councillors Bell, D. Forbes, P. Gibson, Howe, Snowdon, A. Wright and T. Wright.

Also Present:-

Councillor Charlton – Prosperous City Portfolio Holder.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Cuthbert, Old and J.B. Scott.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th June, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 16th June, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record and that Members' comments in relation to the Economic Masterplan, as detailed in page 3 of the minutes be submitted to Council for consideration.

Response from Cabinet – 24th June, 2010 – Policy Review – Working Neighbourhood Strategy

The Deputy Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Prosperous City, 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 the operation of the Working Neighbourhood Strategy.

(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 the action plan relating to each recommendation.

Councillor Charlton, Portfolio Holder for Prosperous City, presented the feedback in relation to the Action Plan and was joined by Karen Alexander, Acting Employment and Training Manager, to address any comments or question from Members.

Councillor Gibson stated that Job Linkage had been in existence for a number of years and had benefited from Council funding streams over this period of time without providing a great deal of feedback to Members. Councillor Charlton advised that feedback reports had been submitted to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees, however, Councillor T. Wright concurred with Councillor Gibson that the Council had 75 elected Members, not all of whom sat on Cabinet or a Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Charlton suggested that perhaps a mechanism could be devised whereby the information was disseminated via the Area Committees.

Councillor Snowdon referred to the cessation of the Working Neighbourhood Strategy in March 2011 and the possibility that its replacement may not be operational for a further 6 months. She asked how would any potential gaps be filled. Ms. Alexander confirmed that the money at the schemes disposal would cease on the 31st March, 2011. The Council was trying to explore possibilities to carry services forward with prime contractors. It was possible that a report to Cabinet on the matter would be submitted in November. It was also possible that the Comprehensive Spending Review in October may provide some transitional funding.

Councillor Howe referred to Councillor Charlton's comments in his presentation that jobs were being created in one hand and lost through the other. He asked if the Council was aware of the correlation between the two. Ms. Alexander replied that if support had not been provided through the Working Neighbourhood Strategy the effects of the recession may have been far greater. It was perhaps true to say however that there had been an element of running to keep still.

Councillor T. Wright referred to the fact that Hitachi were soon to establish a base in Sedgefield and asked how Sunderland could prepare to ensure that potential employees from within the City could benefit? Janet Snaith, Head of the City Business and Investment Team, replied that this would involve establishing what kind of skills sets were required by Hitachi and promoting these through Job Linkage.

The Chairman having thanked Councillor Charlton and Ms. Alexander for their attendance it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the actions contained within the Action Plan as detailed in Appendix A to the report be received and noted.

Low Carbon Economy – Policy Review 2010/11: Baseline Position

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out the baseline position in relation to the Committee's Policy Review on the development of the low carbon economy in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Janet Snaith, Head of the City Business and Investment Team, presented the report which:-

- reiterated the previously agreed terms of reference;
- provided Members with definitions of the Low Carbon Economy;
- the national policy context;
- the local policy background; and
- an overview of Sunderland as a Low Carbon Place and the growth of Low Carbon businesses in the City.

To compliment the report, Kathryn Warrington provided Members with a comprehensive Powerpoint presentation which outlined:-

- the climate change drivers, including the Nottingham declaration on Climate Change (signed September 2001), the EUROCITIES declaration (signed October 2008), the Climate Change Bill (November 2008) and the EU Covenant of Mayors (signed February 2009);
- the extent of Sunderland City Council's carbon emissions;
- Sunderland's vision i.e. 'Sunderland City Council will become a Low Carbon Council by using energy more efficiently and by using and developing more of our own low carbon energy sources';
- Sunderland's target to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 10% in 5 years;
- the development of the Carbon Plan;
- the Climate Change Action Plan;
- Sunderland's Energy Summit;
- Sunderland's Low Carbon City Champions.

Councillor Gibson advised that Sunderland City Council had been named as one of the members of the Low Carbon City Campaign. He stated, however, that if the Council was a firm believer in the Low Carbon Economy it should be seen to be leading from the front. He referred to recent attempts by Portland School to erect windmills only to have their applications declined by the Planning Section.

Ms. Warrington confirmed that the planning regulations with regard to wind turbines

were complex, however, turbines had been approved at Venerable Bede, St. Roberts, Houghton Kieper and Hetton Lyons Schools. Planning consent was less of an issue with regard to solar panels and Ms. Warrington believed personally that photovoltaic cells were the way forward with regard to renewable energy. Ms. Warrington advised that the Council was working with the National Renewable Energy Centre Limited (NAREC) to provide funding for solar panels in public accessible buildings such as the Civic Centre, Museum and Winter Gardens and the City Library. With regard to turbines, work had been done with the Partnership for Renewals to identify potential sites within the City. Of the 20 identified only 2 had ultimately proved suitable (the former Ryhope Golf Course and Hetton Woodland).

Councillor Snowdon stated that she had had initial concerns regarding wind turbines, particularly in relation to potential noise pollution, however, these had been allayed upon visiting the large wind farm at Eppleton. Ms. Warrington advised that the Utilities periodically arranged visits to the sites and she would inform Members when the next dates had been announced.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Howe, Ms. Warrington confirmed that 24% of the Council's carbon emissions came from street lighting. Janet Snaith, Head of the City Business and Investment Team, also confirmed that the retrofit to 139 Gentoo homes was the largest scheme of its kind in the UK.

The Chairman having suggested that Low Carbon Place be the subject of a Task and Finish Group and that the aspects outlined in paragraph 7.8 of the report should be considered by the Committee as a whole, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that Low Carbon Place be delegated to a Task and Finish Group for consideration.

Year End Performance Report 2009/2010 Prosperity and Economic Development

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a performance update relating to the period April 2009 to March 2010 including details of key achievements, resident satisfaction surveys and progress in relation to LAA targets and other national indicators.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Gillian Robinson, Corporate Performance Monitoring Manager, presented the report and together with Karen Alexander, addressed questions and comments from Members.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor D. Forbes, Ms. Alexander advised that the £10 million package of IT training had been awarded to Sunderland after the City had won first prize in a competition organised by Microsoft. This was part of a campaign to use digital technology to help people into work. The Council would not receive money directly but would have the ability to enable people to access Microsoft training courses. In response to an enquiry from Councillor T. Wright,

Ms. Alexander advised that she did not know the full extent of the take up to date as the project was being led by the Council's ICT service. She would, however, investigate and ensure Members received an update.

Councillor T. Wright referred to Performance Indicator (PI) NI 171 regarding VAT registration rates. He noted that the target had increased by 3% to 36.1 per 10,000 population and asked if this was realistic given the economic downturn.

Ms. Robinson advised that the PI was a National Indicator, however, there was an ongoing debate as to the appropriateness of VAT as a measure.

Councillor A. Wright referred to paragraph 3.1 and asked how far off full occupation were the units at Rainton Bridge Business Park as he believed the Park was well short of 75% occupation. Janet Snaith advised that the developer had targets to meet which it may seek to renegotiate. Despite the economic downturn it wasn't easy to make predictions. The interest from NPower had come out of the blue and negotiations were ongoing which had the potential to bring 500 jobs to the Park.

Councillor A. Wright referred to the bullet point in paragraph 3.3 regarding the promotion of the City as a competitive business location and asked where this was being carried out. As well as regionally and nationally, Janet Snaith advised that promotion was also undertaken in Washington DC, China, Detroit and India.

There being no further questions for Ms. Robinson or Ms. Snaith, the Chairman thanked them for their report and it was:-

4. RESOLVED 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 Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Snowdon referred to item 01428 regarding Job Linkage and that it was referred to the Committee prior to submission to Cabinet. The Chairman having requested that item 01409 (to approve the employment strategy) was also submitted to the Committee, it was:-

5. 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 work during the 2010-11 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. 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) M. MORDEY,
Chairman.