

At a meeting of the PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY 12TH MAY, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mordey in the Chair

Councillors Bell, I. Cuthbert, Rolph, J.B. Scott and A. Wright.

Also Present:-

Mr. M. Arnott
Councillor Snowdon
Councillor Tate

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Committee held on 17th March, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 17th March, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Variation in the Order of Business

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed to vary the order of business to consider Item 4 at Item 3 on the agenda.

Tourism and Marketing Task and Finish Group – Final Report

The Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (copy circulated) to receive the draft final report from the Committee's Task and Finish Group with regard to Tourism and Marketing in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman invited Claire Harrison, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, to present the report.

Ms. Harrison took the Committee through the aim of the Task and Finish Group, the agreed Terms of Reference, Methods of Investigation and the Group's findings.

The Committee's key recommendations to the Cabinet were as follows:-

- (a) That all council-wide strategies relevant to building Sunderland's profile as a visitor destination be consistent with their key messages and complement the future development of the City's Destination Management Plan;
- (b) That the identification of an appropriate champion/lead officer and the creation of a partnership to market the City as a destination be further explored;
- (c) That the City Council develops stronger links with Durham Area Tourism Partnership to ensure that opportunities for joint working are fully explored, building upon the shared strengths of the two areas;
- (d) That a 'whole city' approach to the marketing of attractions and events be adopted to be delivered through the Sunderland Marketing Partnership;
- (e) That, in light of the difficulties in the current economic climate, innovative approaches to developing the accommodation offer within Sunderland together with maximising the existing use of accommodation be further explored;
- (f) That a review of the existing tourist information and signage across the City be undertaken to ensure a clear and consistent approach is adopted;
- (g) That building upon Sunderland's strengths, particularly the success of the City's events programme, further opportunities are identified to enhance the existing events programme and promote the quality and warmth of Sunderland's welcome to visitors, with the aim of increasing the number of visitors and length of time they stay; and
- (h) That in order to develop the Sunderland offer, a full review of assets is undertaken to assess the current demand and usage, with a view to identifying how they can be further developed.

Referring to paragraph 8.31 of the report, Councillor Rolph requested that the fourth paragraph is amended to read 'The group also suggested that events should be promoted in surrounding areas'.

Members agreed that it was a very coherent and competent report and the Chairman thanked Claire Harrison for her efforts.

Councillor Cuthbert queried whether the Task and Finish Group had considered the link into the retail offering in Sunderland.

The Chairman advised that due to time restraints it had not been possible to fully consider the retail aspect of tourism in the City.

Councillor Bell stated that the Group had touched on visitor spend for day visitors which would include the retail aspect.

Ms. Harrison referred the Committee to paragraph 8.2 of the report which presented a statistical table for Sunderland analysing expenditure by sector. Although not explained in detail, the table provided the 2007 and 2008 spend on shopping by visitors.

Councillor Rolph commented that it had quickly occurred to the Group that shopping was not one of the major attractions for visitors to the City and, as such, it was decided to look at other strengths in Sunderland such as the Empire and the Stadium of Light. If the Committee carried out any follow up work on the report then different aspects of attracting visitors to Sunderland could be considered.

Having thanked all the people who contributed to the evidence base during the course of the review, including Councillors Dixon and Morrissey, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Committee's key recommendations be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

Policy Review of the Working Neighbourhood Strategy – Draft Final Report

The Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Scrutiny Committee with its draft final report following a review of the use of the Working Neighbourhood Fund (WNF) in Sunderland through the Working Neighbourhood Strategy (WNS).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karen Brown, Scrutiny Officer, presented a summary of the report and advised that the aim of the review was to examine the implementation and operation of the Working Neighbourhood Fund in Sunderland, including the perspective of the customer and their experience with various agencies through first contact, engagement, job readiness into work and support in work.

The Chairman invited Mr. Michael Arnott, former Vice Chairman of the Committee to comment on the report.

Mr. Arnott advised that although senior members of staff had suggested significant amendments to the report, it was decided that it was inappropriate to amend the report and it should be presented to the Executive for them to respond to the findings and amend if deemed necessary. [note – the Cabinet has not yet seen the report]

Mr. Arnott stated that a huge amount of time was spent on gaining the evidence upon which the findings were based. The Group were conscious of the responsibility to function in an apolitical manner.

In the reports commissioned into Working Neighbourhood Fund activity, a number of clients were randomly sampled and, according to the author of the survey study, although the numbers were too small to be extrapolated in any significant confident way, it gave a broad insight into the Job Linkage Service.

Councillor Cuthbert reiterated the comments from Michael Arnott with the acknowledgement that there were problems with flexibility of approach. It was hoped that the recommendations from the review would rectify the co-operation between various bodies.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Michael Arnott for his work throughout the year as Vice Chairman to the Committee. He also thanked the other members of the Task and Finish Group. The Chairman concluded by sharing the latest available general statistics on worklessness for the City and proposed the report be put to Cabinet in its entirety.

Councillor Arnott also requested that his thanks and appreciation be placed on record for the commitment of Karen Brown and Claire Harrison to the review.

He reciprocated the remarks of the Chairman and advised that his working relationship with Councillor Mordey had been very fruitful and a good signpost for future co-operative working across the political parties.

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

(Signed) M. MORDEY,
Chairman.