

Sunderland City Council

At and EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL held in CITY SPACE, SUNDERLAND UNIVERSITY on WEDNESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2011 at 6.00pm

Present: The Mayor (Councillor N Wright) in the Chair
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor I Kay)

Councillors	Allan	Fletcher	McClennan	Tate
	Anderson	Forbes	G Miller	Thompson
	Ball	S Foster	D Richardson	D Trueman
	Bell	T Foster	Rolph	H Trueman
	Blackburn	E Gibson	Scanlan	Wakefield
	Bonallie	P Gibson	Shattock	P Watson
	Charlton	Gofton	Smiles	S Watson
	Copeland	Heron	D Smith	Williams
	Curran	Kelly	P Smith	Wilson
	Dixon	Lauchlan	Snowdon	Wiper
	Ellis	MacKnight	Speding	Wood
	Essl	T Martin		

In Attendance: Members of the Panel: -

Councillor Paul Watson, Dave Smith, Dr Ian Pattison, Shirley Atkinson and Kay Blyth.

Also Present:

Sunderland City Council

Chris Alexander	Mike Foster
Abdul Amin	Philip Foster
Pauline Blyth	Julie Gray
Phil Browning	Stephen Hazlett
Charlotte Burnham	Jane Hibberd
Graham Burt	Matthew Hunt
Alan Caddick	Janet Johnson
Jean Carter	Graham King
Andrew Carton	Helen Lancaster
Norma Clark	Ray Leonard
Michelle Coates	Deborah Lewin
Pippa Corner	James Magog
Nonnie Crawford	Keith Moore
Nigel Cummings	Dave Murray
Colin Curtis	Dennis Napier
Paul Davies	David Ord
Yvonne Ewington	Malcolm Page
Graeme Farnworth	Iris Palfreyman
Helen Ford	Allison Patterson

John Rawling
Neil Revely
Andrew Seekings
Raj Singh
Julie Smith
Phil Spooner
Sue Stanhope

Lee Stoddart
Elizabeth Swann
Vince Taylor
Nicol Trueman
Gillian Warnes
Elaine Waugh
Jane Wheeler

Representatives of the Following External Organisations: -

Groundwork North East x 2
Northumbria Police
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust x 4
Gentoo Group x 4
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue
NHS
City Equals Group x 2
Nexus x 3
University of Sunderland x 2
Sunderland Street Pastors x 3
City of Sunderland College x 2
City Hospitals
Northumbria Probation Trust
Sunderland Partnership
Voluntary and Community Action Sunderland
Etec Trust
Youth Parliament x 10
Sunderland Echo
Go North East
Sunderland Counselling Services
Representatives of Community Spirit

And also Members of the Public

Notice

The Notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

Welcome by the Mayor

The Mayor, Councillor N Wright, welcomed those present to the City Council's tenth Annual State of the City Event. She welcomed all guests, Council Members, partners and members of the public and then briefly outlined the programme for debate.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Francis, Gallagher, Hall, Maddison, F Miller, Mordey, Morrissey, Porthouse, Scaplehorn, Tye, Walker, Waller, A Wright and T Wright.

Leader's Introductory Speech

Councillor Paul Watson, the Leader of the Council, began by referring to recent press articles about Sunderland and its achievements which illustrated how the city was viewed both nationally and internationally. Featured topics included the level of manufacturing exports from Nissan, the development of software city and digital connectivity, Sunderland International Airshow and XL Youth Villages.

The Leader welcomed those present to the event and said how much he had enjoyed the events in the past and that he, and his fellow councillors, wanted to hear the public's views, concerns and aspirations for Sunderland. What was heard at this event would be key to the decisions the council would be making over the coming year.

He explained that members of the Council's Cabinet would be listening very carefully to what people had to say and would also be available towards the end of the evening to discuss local issues with those present on a more individual basis.

For the main debate, the Panel would be hearing views and questions about the city's 'People, Place and Economy' and the Leader went on to outline some key points relating to 'the state of the city' in this context. Despite the challenges faced over the last year, Sunderland still had much to celebrate and to be proud of.

The Economic Masterplan had been launched at the end of 2010 and it was vital that this plan was in existence to provide a clear focus on what would help the city's economy to recover and grow as quickly as possible. The Council and its partners were committed to a number of key aims through the Masterplan: -

- Developing a vibrant city centre;
- Establishing Sunderland as a University City;
- Developing the city as a low carbon economic hub within the North East region and nationally; and
- Making sure communities are supported, resilient and have all the opportunities they need for a good quality of life.

Although economic conditions had been difficult, the city had continued to see investment and the Nissan car battery plant, which will create up to 350 jobs and play a major role in the city's low carbon industry plans, was due to start operating by the end of the year.

Sunderland Software Centre would open in 2012 as a centrepiece for Sunderland Software City, which was a private and public partnership initiative to inspire and support the growth of the local software industry. Linked to the University of Sunderland and city's schools, a key aim of Software City was to develop and provide an environment for, local talent and the city's IT entrepreneurs to flourish.

The Leader expressed his pride in the events which had taken place in Sunderland this year and which had welcomed people from all over the world. Major music events had provided a boost to the local economy and the International Airshow had again been a great success. The UNESCO World Heritage Site assessor had visited the Wearmouth-Jarrow site in the last few days and the final decision on this was eagerly anticipated in 2012.

The Leader also paid tribute to the community spirit of the people of Sunderland and their generosity and support for charities including the Sunderland 10km run, the Sunderland Memorial Wall and Japanese tsunami disaster effort. This generosity of spirit and determination and resilience in challenging times would stand the city in good stead for the future.

The Council and its partners did not underestimate the size of the challenge ahead in the current and predicted economic conditions and the Leader referred to his colleagues on the Panel as people who were at the forefront of facing these challenges in the city.

The Leader thanked his fellow panel members for joining him this evening and the University for providing the venue for what he hoped would be an interesting and informative debate.

State of the City Event

The debate was facilitated by Richard Moss, Political Editor, BBC North East and Cumbria. Richard welcomed those present and advised that the Panel for the evening comprised: -

Councillor Paul Watson (Leader of Sunderland City Council), Dave Smith (Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council), Shirley Atkinson (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Chief Executive, Sunderland University), Dr Ian Pattison (Chairman, Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group) and Chief Superintendent Kay Blyth (Northumbria Police).

Richard Moss advised that questions had been submitted to the "Your City, Your Say" State of City Event website and the three most popular had been selected and would be answered prior to the open debate: -

What improvements are planned to the city's transport infrastructure in the near future? Might this include extending the Metro to the north side of the river and re-opening the Leamside line, and what are the plans for the 'Iconic Bridge' and the Port to attract and support business?

The Leader of the Council responded by stating that work on the new Wear Bridge was well advanced and a best and final bid for funding from the Department for Transport had been submitted on 9 September. The result of the bid would be known in December and if successful, it was anticipated that work would start in 2012 and that the bridge would open in 2015.

With regard to road improvements, the Leader advised that a scheme was being prepared for improvements to St Mary's Way and the Council continued to work with developers to bring forward other improvements to the highway network.

The Leader reported that Nexus (the Passenger Transport Executive) were carrying out a study on options for extensions to the Metro system. The Council continued to work with Nexus to improve public transport and had recently launched a low emissions bus service to serve the city centre.

Those present were informed that the Port Board had now been established, a Port Director had been appointed and trade was starting to build up. The Port was accessible, ready to do business 24-7 and this had to be capitalised upon. There were a lot of initiatives being developed around wind energy and the Port was well placed to take advantage of this. Overall, the Council was working on many different fronts to move forward on transport issues.

Are we likely to see improvements and developments in the city in the next 20 years of the kind seen elsewhere? The city centre in particular needs to be cleaner, more vibrant and have a better cultural offer – what are the Council's plans for the city centre including the Vaux site and former Kwik Save building? Also the location of the regional Enterprise Zone along the 'A19 corridor' seems to be a positive thing for the city. When can we expect a decision on this and when will construction work commence?

Dave Smith responded that he was extremely confident that there would be significant development in the city, although the challenges ahead also had to be acknowledged. He stated that the work and investment of the Council and its partners meant that he was able to be optimistic about the economic future of Sunderland. Small business growth and inward investment for new jobs and businesses in the city was good and there were opportunities available to leverage private sector investment.

The Chief Executive was pleased to report that the Council had succeeded in taking ownership of the Vaux site and had been able to bring Tesco into the city on the Sunderland Retail Park. The Vaux site would take years to develop and would be led by private sector investment, however the site would be landscaped and made usable in the short term. It was intended to create a city centre business quarter similar to Doxford Park on the site along with new housing to take advantage of the central location and views along the river corridor.

There was active developer interest in Holmeside Triangle and the Crowtree site and some 50% of the properties in the Holmeside area were now in the ownership of public bodies, namely One North East and the Homes and Communities Agency. The Council was planning to demolish those properties, including Kwik Save, before the end of the year and to make the site secure.

Private and public investment in the city centre continued and plans for an extension to the Bridges, through a development with Primark, were now underway.

Dave Smith advised that the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership had been successful in securing an Enterprise Zone which would include the A19 Corridor, Turbine Business Park and Nissan. This was a massive achievement and would have potential in the short and medium term. Advanced manufacturing could generate a huge amount of wealth and attract investment for the people of Sunderland. From the agreement to the delivery of the Enterprise Zone would take time and focus and could only happen if the Partnership continued to work together.

In the past, partnerships between the Council and private businesses had made successful bids to the Regional Growth Fund and there was no reason why these relationships could not continue to thrive in the future.

Does the Council believe that £1.5m is adequate for the regeneration of Roker/Seaburn? If not, what level of investment would bring the area up to a good standard and what will be done to improve entertainment at the seafront?

The Leader of the Council acknowledged that while £1.5m was a large sum, it could not fund all the works required. He understood the affinity which the people of the city had with Roker and Seaburn and plans were now in place to regenerate the area in the context of the Council's Seafront Strategy and its masterplan for Marine Walk and Seaburn. The plans had been widely consulted upon and largely welcomed.

The budget of £1.5m would fund public realm improvements but private funds would also have to be engaged for the full regeneration of the area. The Council could use its land ownership and regulatory powers to attract investors and secure continual improvement for the seafront.

Open Debate

Economy

Richard Moss invited Shirley Atkinson to lead the discussion on the 'Economy' theme.

Shirley Atkinson thanked the Council for the opportunity to take part in the debate and referred to the aims of the Sunderland Economic Masterplan and some key facts about the economy and skills in the city. In the last 20 years, since the decline of major industries, 20,000 new jobs had been created, but levels of worklessness were still high with 20.3% of the population receiving benefits.

A high proportion of residents were qualified to NVQ Levels 1 and 2 but a smaller percentage were qualified to Levels 3 and 4 when compared to the national average and therefore earnings and spending power were lower than average. The majority of high value jobs in the city were filled by non Sunderland residents.

What role could the University play in the City's economic development: It had 17,000 students studying in Sunderland from over 30 countries across the world and approximately 10,000 students studying in overseas colleges and universities. As a business, the University employs 1700 people and sub contracts services which provide further indirect employment within the city.

The University has significant activity underway to support the business community through knowledge transfer schemes, internship programmes, consultancy, collaborative research and business clinics. To support enterprise, the University operates hatcheries and business support units where graduates can develop and grow successful businesses.

Shirley Atkinson highlighted that the University was an active participant in local communities and posed the question how could the University 'add value' by working with and alongside the Council and its partners. Some examples included the new academic programme in low carbon technologies which feeds directly into the aspirations to be a 'low carbon city' and to develop the skills to support this sector. £8m had been invested in the sciences complex and laboratories so that the University was able to offer the best facilities for teaching, learning and research in pharmaceuticals and related science subjects. The advanced manufacturing research facility had also recently been nominated for a national award.

The University was also working closely with the Council to develop a strategy for the development of creative and cultural industries and 30 businesses had been supported in the last year through the University's Creativitiworks hatchery.

Enterprise was a significant theme for the University and it was currently working with the Council to produce an enterprise and innovation strategy and was reviewing its offer to identify how sessions on enterprise, mentoring and support could be provided to all students to encourage the creation of more new businesses.

With regard to the City being at the heart of a 'low carbon economic area', the University had ambitious plans to reduce its carbon footprint by 48% by 2021 and was involved in the low carbon bus partnership with the Council and Nexus. It would also be hosting an event in November with the Energy and Environmental Industries Forum which would focus on low carbon. These initiatives were aimed at building capacity, reputation and skills in this key area.

The Economic Masterplan stated that the City's future was tied to the wider economy and the City must be collaborative and outward looking. The University had 25% of its business tied up in international markets and the student population understood the need to be flexible and mobile.

Shirley Atkinson concluded by saying that worklessness, skill levels and economic activity were significant challenges and the University continued to work with the Council to improve the skills levels of communities and to create an environment which embraced learners. In this way, the University could help foster a climate which would help to deliver a strong, diverse economy for the future.

Questions

There is a lot of work to do on people's perceptions of the city. Aerospace manufacturing industries and Rolls Royce had been in the city for many years but do not appear in any promotional material – why is this? Can we not get the small things, such as road markings, right?

The Leader responded that the Council did work closely with big companies in the city and had been heavily involved in Roll Royce's recent move to Washington, which had embedded them in the city for the foreseeable future. He acknowledged that Sunderland did not always make enough of its positive aspects and that had to be worked upon.

Road markings were an issue in many areas of the country and councils could not be expected to keep everything perfect at all times. Difficult decisions had to be

made about which works would take priority as the Council tried to make best use of finite resources.

In the evening, the city is very quiet. Is there anything being done to attract more people through tourism and culture? The Great North Run brings a lot of people to the area – could Sunderland do something similar, maybe a cycle race? Can something be provided for young people in the city?

The Chief Executive replied that the Council was aware of the need to drive the development of the evening economy and tourism but was realistic about the steps which had to be taken. He advised that the Council saw the development and expansion of the events offer as key to moving forward in attracting local people and people from outside the area.

He highlighted that a quarter of a million people had come into the city as a result of the concerts at the Stadium of Light during the summer. This had generated an increased spend in the city of £18 million and visitors had gone away with a positive view of what Sunderland had to offer. The International Airshow had also attracted one million people over the weekend.

What mattered to business was the number of people in the city and spending money in the city. The Council had also invested in the calendar of Christmas activities and listened to the views of the public about events such as this. The Council believed it was rising to the challenge of increasing tourism to the city.

If the 'Iconic Bridge' gets the go ahead, where will the funding come from?

The Leader advised that things had changed since the plan for the bridge had first been developed and the Government had put a freeze on funding from the transport pool. Some money was still available and the Council had submitted a best and final offer to the Department for Transport in September and the result of this would be known in December. The cost to the Government would be £78 million and a contribution would be made from the Council. A final agreement was yet to be made with the potential constructors of the bridge but it was expected that the final cost would be over £100 million.

With regard to the economy, companies were leaving the city centre. Why was the Joplings building still empty? And now TJ Hughes was to close. Newcastle seemed not to be suffering in the same way.

The Chief Executive advised that Newcastle was not weathering the situation better than Sunderland, shops were closing in the same way. Stores relied on consumers spending money and all were suffering. Local economies were also affected by national companies closing down.

It had to be recognised that in order to have a sustainable future, the thing to do would be to make the city centre as attractive as possible for investors when the economy picked up. When premises become available, alternative uses would be sought. Discussions were ongoing with a number of developers regarding buildings in the city centre including Joplings.

The Bridges currently had no empty units and the owners of the mall wanted to extend. The Leader highlighted that the Council was not a business but it needed to create an environment in which businesses could thrive.

Sunderland should be proud that it is at one end of the coast to coast cycle route, but there is no sign to mark this at the seafront.

The Chief Executive noted this point and stated that action would be taken to address this.

People

Richard Moss then asked Dr Ian Pattison to make an opening statement on 'People'.

Dr Pattison introduced himself as a local GP from Ryhope and stated that in the past, GPs had often asked for more responsibility for the healthcare of their patients and this was now happening with the shift to GP commissioning.

Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group had been formed in March 2011 and it was made up of all the practices in Sunderland. Six GPs had been elected by their peers to form the Board of this group to see the health reforms through locally.

The Clinical Commissioning Group would work alongside the PCT until they became statutory bodies and took over responsibility for commissioning most local health services from the PCT in April 2013. The group was currently a pathfinder and would be testing out the new arrangements for the next 18 months. The Commissioning Group was also working with the Council through the Early Implementer Health and Wellbeing Board and considering the best ways to make best use of public money.

Rather than taking over, the Clinical Commissioning Group would add value because it was made up of front line clinicians who could work directly with other clinicians to reform the way services were delivered and see where things could be improved.

Going forward, the aim was to deliver the best outcomes possible and to be both responsible and accountable for health needs in the city. Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group was committed to working in partnership with the PCT and the local authority to take Sunderland on this journey.

Questions

I understand that all patients are entitled to their own autonomy. Why does Sunderland TPCT refuse to acknowledge this?

Dr Pattison advised that he could not speak on behalf of the PCT, but assured the questioner that all GPs put their patients at the centre of their considerations.

Gateshead local authority area has one Clinical Commissioning Group. Why does Sunderland, which twice the size and has 57 GP practices, not have more than one commissioning group?

Dr Pattison responded that historically Sunderland had worked in three groups but GPs had decided that they were best working together. Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group was one umbrella body but would be split into five groups below that which were co-terminus with the local authority regeneration areas.

I always come out of the State of the City debate invigorated but then lose my enthusiasm. I have asked people what Sunderland is about and what is its vision and people don't know. There are very few young people in the room and the Council website is not laid out to be attractive to young people. It might be a good idea to hold an event like this for sixth formers. The Council should be congratulated for the parks in the area.

The Leader replied that engagement and communication could be problematic across the city and the Council did appreciate people coming to events such as this.

Events such as the State of the City were held for young people and the Leader stated that Sunderland had one of the most progressed Youth Parliaments in the country and he always received some extremely searching questions from the young people when he attended their meetings. The Council was proud of what it did with young people but maybe it needed to do more to let adults know this.

As a resident of Houghton, we are very concerned about our air quality due to the landfill site at Houghton quarry.

The Leader responded that he understood the concerns of the questioner but the Council could only do so much with their powers in this area. When complaints were raised they were actively pursued with the company involved.

The major issue of responsibility for this situation belonged with the Environment Agency and they also had to work within their powers.

Elected Members frequently raised these issues on behalf of their constituents and the Leader stated that he would oppose any extension of the quarry.

Place

Finally, Richard Moss invited Superintendent Kay Blyth to introduce the discussion on 'Place'.

Superintendent Blyth stated how proud she was to be part of the Safer Sunderland Partnership which was working to make Sunderland a safer place for everyone. She highlighted that there were 1,637 fewer victims of crime in 2010/2011 when compared to 2002/2003 which has contributed to a reduction of 50% in recorded crime over the last eight years.

Feelings of safety had greatly improved and seven out of ten residents thought that the police and council were dealing with the crime and anti-social behaviour issues which matter locally.

The Police understand that not all incidents were reported and this was why the Safer Communities Survey was conducted annually, to get a more rounded picture of public perceptions, and to help all services, not just the police, to respond in a more effective manner.

An example of this type of working is the Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPS) which consist of representatives from the police and partner agencies and identify solutions to a range of problems such as anti-social behaviour and off road motorbikes. These LMAPS had support for their work from all political groupings in the city.

Superintendent Blyth went on to highlight some of the work currently being done within the city, such as the Integrated Offender Management scheme which targets prolific offenders and those causing the most harm to communities. Alcohol-related issues were regularly raised by residents and the police work in partnership with other agencies to carry out licensing enforcement, tackle underage sales and carry out drug and weapon searches. The launch of the street pastor scheme and marshalled taxi ranks have also helped to reduce disorder and to defuse volatile situations in the city centre at night.

The Safer Sunderland Partnership had been recognised as one of the leading community safety partnerships nationally, but they were aware of the challenges ahead.

The economic situation posed a particular challenge but it remained a priority of Northumbria Police to continue to deliver excellent policing. Superintendent Blyth assured the audience that Neighbourhood Policing was still alive and well and locally based officers would continue to provide a strong, visible presence.

The transition to Police and Crime Commissioners also raised significant issues for councils, police authorities and partners but the Safer Sunderland Partnership remained committed to working together through this and to continue to demonstrate value for money and deliver on its promises.

Questions

The Police have not done anything about a recent incident of violence perpetrated by young people hanging around a local shop.

Superintendent Blyth indicated that she would be happy to discuss individual cases outside the public part of the meeting but added that 95% of young people were law-abiding and sometimes the perception was greater than the actual level of bad behaviour.

The police worked with youth engagement and anti-social behaviour officers on operations and as the local anti-social behaviour services became more flexible, they would be looking at different ways to tackle this sort of disorder.

The LMAPS and local Community Beat Officers have had a big impact and been very successful. I have concerns about people bullying and abusing the most vulnerable in our communities.

Superintendent Blyth agreed that there were vulnerable people who deserved the protection from relevant agencies and the local community. Training had recently been delivered on this issue for officers and there was a role to play for the community in providing intelligence relating to such abuse. The key would be in being able to identify repeat victims and putting measures in place at an early stage but the police were becoming more attuned to this issue.

Northumbria Police have said that they cannot provide traffic management from officers for the Houghton Remembrance Day Parade. Could I ask Superintendent Blyth to request volunteers to do this?

Superintendent Blyth responded that the issue of road closures for events was in the hands of the local authority. However, the police provided a contingent at events in the city through officers volunteering on their day off and where possible, cover being provided by neighbourhood policing.

The Chief Executive added that the city put a huge amount of importance on its remembrance parades and the Council continued to ensure that the events were marshalled and supported. The Council worked with communities to ensure that proper action was taken with regard to road closures and would continue to provide every resource it could for these events.

I've heard you say that you want the people of Sunderland to spend money in the city, can we not advertise Sunderland in the south of the country as a base for manufacturing etc and use the city's students to publicise what Sunderland has to offer?

Dave Smith advised that Sunderland did market itself both nationally and internationally but it could and should improve the way it does that. The Council was taking advantage of support from business in the city and wanted to develop a campaign which had a real impact, both within the United Kingdom, and internationally.

Shirley Atkinson highlighted that the University had a huge number of marketing, recruiting and campaigning events across the country and would certainly be able to use its students to obtain views about the city and to get those positive opinions across to others.

Why were the residents of Millfield not consulted about the siting of the new mosque? The site has been sold underhandedly.

The Leader of the Council responded that the land had not been sold. The Cabinet had agreed that, in line with Council policy, assets which were surplus to requirements, in this case the garage at St Mark's Road, could be disposed of for a reasonable market offer.

The disposal of the land was conditional on the community association obtaining planning permission for the site. This planning application process would be where the local community would have the opportunity to make representations on the proposed use of the site.

With regard to this issue, there were two community groups with differing opinions and it would be wrong for the Council to decide which was the correct view. Any decision made on the land would be to the rule and without bias.

Close of the Event

As Chair of the debate, Richard Moss closed the open discussion and thanked all present for their attendance.