

**At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 20TH OCTOBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.**

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair.

Councillors M. Dixon, Ellis, Errington, Foster, Rolph, J. Scott, Wares and A. Wilson.

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Chamberlin and L. Walton.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee

Update on Policy Review Recommendations – 'A Place to Play'

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, referred the Committee to the enquiry made with regard to involving Members on the Music Development Group. He advised that the Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism had reported that the music strategy was currently under review with the notion of updating the Music Steering Group and had suggested that the Committee might want to recommend which elected Members should be invited.

Consideration having been given to the above matter, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that:-
 - i) the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd September, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record; and
 - ii) Councillors Ellis and Rolph be nominated to be invited to become Members of the Music Steering Group.

Declarations of Interest

Item 8 – Access to Housing Policy Review 2009/10: Progress Report

Councillor Rolph declared a personal interest as a Member of the Board of the Woodcock and Bowes Charity.

Young Persons Supported Housing Project

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing information relating to the Centrepoint Supported Housing Scheme which was the subject of a report to Cabinet on 7 October 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Peter Smith, Housing Strategy and Options Manager, briefed the Committee on the report. He highlighted that a new site for the project had been sought to the north of the City Centre and a site identified at Dundas Street, Monkwearmouth, in order to provide a purpose built building for the project. He explained that Centrepoint was currently based in Mowbray Road, Hendon and that the building was not 'fit for purpose' due to the layout of the accommodation, size and condition of the building, in respect of the office accommodation, treatment/support rooms on site and the building's general maintenance.

In response to Councillor Ellis who enquired what would happen to the building in Mowbray Road, Mr. Smith stated that the building was privately owned and that he was not party to what it would be used for. He stated that it was located in the area for the New Deal for Communities and suggested that there would be consultation with local residents as to its future use.

Councillor Rolph referred the Committee to paragraph 3.3 of the report and enquired as to the statement 'to help to ensure that supported accommodation is available in a range of areas across the City'. She referred to the Cabinet Report of 7 October and commented that all the sites identified were in the north area of the City and asked whether this area was in greater need.

Mr. Smith stated that the Council was trying to recreate a wider spread of resources and looking at support agencies within reach and close proximity and on good bus links. He added that sometimes young people did not want to come into the City Centre. It was hoped to cater for the wider outlying areas of the City, however, for the moment the most appropriate site had been identified for the short term.

Councillor Rolph commented that with regard to links to the rest of the City, for example, Easington Lane to Monkwearmouth was not accessible and it was going to be difficult to get to. She enquired whether Dundas Street would provide a model for similar sites across the City and where Mr. Smith envisaged they would be located.

Mr. Smith stated that he was not able to say at the moment and that it depended on funding and future planning. It was hoped that they could look at providing similar schemes around the different areas of the City. However, due to the economic climate and the uncertainty around budgets this was a start to address the accommodation needs of young people in the City.

The Chairman having commented that the Committee recognised that there was a need to start somewhere to address young people's accommodation needs, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report and the information brought out during the debate on the item be received and noted.

Homelessness in Sunderland

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an update on homelessness issues as requested at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22nd September, 2009 relating to the definition of homelessness, the homelessness procedure, reducing/preventing homelessness and hostel accommodation (particularly Camrex House and Barclay Lodge).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Peter Smith, Housing Strategy and Options Manager, briefed the Committee on the report. He drew Members' attention to paragraph 3 concerning the definition of homelessness and to paragraph 5 concerning the innovative responses the Council has embraced in line with Government guidance to reduce/prevent homelessness.

In relation to the statement made by Mr. Smith that there had been 3 people homeless in the City, the Chairman stated that she was alarmed by this as she knew of people sleeping on the floors of friends and family and also drew attention to those families staying in bed and breakfast accommodation in Whitley Bay.

Mr. Smith commented that everything went back to the definition of homeless. There had been 161 homeless acceptances under the statutory definition, however, the prevention figures at September 2009 for the period from April 2009 were 385.

Councillor Rolph congratulated the department on the tremendous amount of work undertaken to prevent people from becoming homeless. She referred to the Safer Homes Initiative which was not mentioned in the report which she stated also contributed to the work on prevention, helping people to stay in their own homes. Councillor Rolph commented that in relation to the service activity detailed on Appendix 1 to the report, take up in relation to the outreach work undertaken at Houghton was low and enquired how this could be improved. In relation to parents/families/friends being 'more than willing to take them back', Councillor Rolph asked whether the training Housing Officers received included an awareness of the issues around 'arranged marriages'.

Mr. Smith advised that the department was currently undertaking a review of the housing options and that some of the information provided at the meeting had come about as a result of the research undertaken. This would be analysed and it was hoped result in an enhanced Housing Options Strategy. With regard to the Safer Homes Initiative, Mr. Smith thanked Councillor Rolph for the kind comments and stated that this was not used as much with the Council's clients but was used more by other agencies. Only one outreach surgery was running whilst the Washington building was being refurbished. Take up had been low but would be addressed and promoted more. This could be done anywhere and did not need to be limited to

Council buildings. With regard to arranged marriages, this was taken very seriously and officers did receive training. Mr. Smith added that a new problem Officers were facing was that they were limited under the legislation and had to provide 'one reasonable offer'. This could mean socially rented property or Council stock if the Council still had its own properties. This linked to the statutory definition of homeless and meant they were limited at times and had to come up with the best offer.

Councillor A. Wilson expressed concern at the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation out of the City.

Mr. Smith stated this was not ideal but hopefully under the prevention agenda if people came for help earlier then there would be time to come up with a better solution. He pointed out that the number shown in the Appendix relating to bed and breakfast accommodation did refer to the number of invoices which were received on a weekly basis and not people and therefore there was some double counting and the figures therefore were not as bad as at first they might appear. Efforts were being made to come up with more resources to meet needs and this was being fed in to the relevant partners to create more alternatives. He referred to the creation of another refuge for example.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired as to what frustrations Officers had in their jobs to help the Committee better understand and whether they had enough staff to provide the service.

Mr. Smith stated that it was sometimes unfortunate that people did not come to the Council earlier. The Team was very focussed on the customer and trying to get the best solution for them. Clients were often dealing with a lot more in terms of need than just housing. Officers were trying to ensure the work they were doing was joined up with partners so clients were getting the best help around, whatever needs they had and the reasons around why they were in that situation in the first place. Getting others involved with expertise in those areas. With regard to staff numbers, part of the Business Improvement Programme was looking at resources. If more resources were identified then he hoped that this would be addressed.

In response to Councillor Dixon's enquiry regarding the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, Mr. Smith stated that this was a good tool but there were strict eligibility criteria and only one case so far had gone forward.

Councillor J. Scott questioned the standard of accommodation provided at Barclay Lodge, commenting that from the outside, the building looked in disrepair as some of its windows were boarded up.

Mr. Smith stated that the facility was regularly assessed and inspected and found to meet the necessary requirements.

Members having listened to the concern expressed at the external appearance of Barclay Lodge it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the content of the report be noted; and
- ii) the Scrutiny Officer investigate the situation around the standard of accommodation provided at Barclay Lodge and report back to Members under separate cover on the matter.

Tackling Climate Change in Sunderland (Report 1: Managing the Council's Carbon Emissions)

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated), which is the first of three, updating the Committee on the Council's work on climate change. The first report updated the Committee on the Council's progress and plans for reducing the carbon emissions of the Council itself.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Neil Cole, Planning and Policy Manager, proceeded to brief the Committee on the report and drew Members' attention to the Carbon Saving Initiatives detailed at paragraph 4 and in particular, the Wind Energy Programme. Mr. Cole stated that he was confident the Council would meet its target to reduce carbon emissions by 10% between 2007 and 2012.

Councillor Foster highlighted the success of the Sunderland Aquatic Centre where carbon emissions were reported to be 30% lower than predicted. However he commented that it would have been useful to include information on Newcastle Road Baths to gauge the difference in carbon emissions between the new Aquatic Centre and the former swimming facility.

In response to Councillor A. Wilson, Mr. Cole advised that there was not a mandatory requirement in planning regulations to install a certain type of window in new homes but there was guidance on standards. In relation to building control, there were regulations coming in for builders to meet certain carbon targets.

Councillor Rolph praised the Council for the consistent way in which it was tackling climate change and the enthusiasm with which it was being done.

Councillor Rolph referred to paragraph 3.2 and enquired how the Council was measuring its carbon emissions. She pointed out there were only four activities listed and suggested the following additions:-

- disposal of its own waste;
- purchase of equipment and stationery;
- construction and maintenance of schools under Building Schools for the Future.

Councillor Rolph commented that paragraph 3.2 did not give any certainty that the above activities were being measured.

Councillor Rolph commented on the plan to remotely shut down any Council PC left on after 7 pm stating that this would need to be managed as there would be occasions when they were in use. She enquired whether there were any plans to look at the switch on/off times in respect of street lighting.

Councillor Rolph advised the Committee that Cumbria County Council was looking at the possibility of regenerating the heat being given off at its crematorium and enquired whether the Council had given any consideration to this.

In response to Councillor Rolph, Mr. Cole advised that in relation to paragraph 3.2 a number of things had been picked up in the Climate Change Action Plan which went into the detail of initiatives such as the whole of the Council's waste, pulling together new schemes etc. One such initiative was the recycling of flowers at the crematorium. Officers were working very closely with the Procurement Team to develop a highly sustainable procurement policy. With regards to construction, the Council continued to look at a number of requirements that it could put on renewable energy and renewable construction techniques. The initiative Councillor Rolph had mentioned regarding the crematorium could be looked at. The ICT Energy Management Policy had taken on board Councillor Rolph's concerns with regard to shutting down any Council PC left on after 7 pm and it would apply to key areas. With regards to street lighting the City Services Directorate was looking to take this forward. By switching on street lights a couple of minutes later and switching them off slightly earlier, for example, a saving would result. However this was only one initiative being looked at.

4. RESOLVED that the progress on managing the Council's carbon emissions be noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Scrutiny Committee with a progress report on the refresh of the Council's Handbook for Overview and Scrutiny specifically in relation to a draft protocol for the appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, referred Members to the protocol for the appointment of Co-opted Members to Scrutiny Committees detailed at Appendix 1. He pointed out that all Scrutiny Committees would refer nominations to Council to appoint to the Committees apart from the variations to this arrangement detailed at paragraph 1.5, concerning the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee.

Mr. Cummings highlighted the table at paragraph 3.4 which might assist the Committee in coming to a decision as to whether to co-opt a Member or receive evidence from an external/expert witness. He also pointed out that the Committee should ensure that the membership achieved a balance between the representative role of elected Members and the value that could be added through bringing in co-

opted Members. Mr. Cummings advised that the comments of the Scrutiny Committee on the protocol would be submitted to the Management Committee for consideration.

Councillor Ellis stated that she was very worried about co-opting people on to the Committees. Members were elected and accountable, whereas co-opted Members were not. She felt that the ability to call expert witnesses was important and covered the input the Committee needed. Co-option could slow discussion and conclusions and she was very concerned about it.

Councillor Rolph stated that she also had concerns about the practicality of co-opting given the timescales. She stated that it would be only by the October meeting that the Committee in any one year would be in a position to co-opt Members, by which time, the co-opted Member would have missed three meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and would have a lot of catching up to do.

Councillor M. Dixon stated that he shared Councillor Ellis' concerns and queried whether given what they had to do, as detailed in the general principles for co-opted Members, if the Committee would be attracting the right kind of people who had something to offer to the Committee. He also said that he was in favour of calling witnesses rather than appointing co-opted Members to the Committee.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny, stated that co-option might not be appropriate for every Scrutiny Committee but was a tool at Members' disposal. The protocol had been developed to create the parameters and guidelines should the Committee wish to co-opt.

The Chairman having commented that if Members did not wish to co-opt Members to the Committee then this would not happen, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the Committee recommends that the draft Co-option Protocol be endorsed and included in the new Handbook and that the above comments be reported to the Management Committee.

Access to Housing Policy Review 2009/10 Progress Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with a progress report on the policy review – Access to Housing.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor M. Dixon reported that he had attended the conference on fairness and flexibility in local housing and had found it useful. He stated that he would provide feedback to the Policy Review Working Group at the first meeting arranged for 28 October 2009.

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, referred to the Centre for Public Policy Seminars' event taking place on 4 December, 2009 at the Royal Commonwealth Society in London. He advised that the event aimed to bring together key figures

from across the sectors in the important debate on how to successfully tackle the challenges of delivering highest quality social and affordable housing to meet the established needs during and beyond the recession and he invited the Committee to nominate attendees.

Councillor Rolph suggested that the policy review also looked at the role of small charities and how they would fit in with the single route to housing. The Woodcock and Bowes Charity for example subsidised housing in the parish of Bishopwearmouth.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the information contained in the report be noted;
- ii) Councillors S. Watson, A. Wilson and Errington be authorised to attend the Centre for Public Policy Seminars' event on 4 December, 2009 at the Royal Commonwealth Society in London as detailed above; and
- iii) the point raised by Councillor Rolph in relation to the role of small charities in providing housing as detailed above be picked up and included in the policy review.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 October, 2009 – 31 January, 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 October – 31 January, 2010 which relate to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

A copy of the latest version of the Forward Plan published on 14 October, 2009 for the period 1 November – 28 February, 2010 was circulated at the meeting for Members' attention.

Councillor Rolph requested that draft reports on the following items on the Forward Plan be submitted for pre-scrutiny before they were submitted to Cabinet:-

- Item 01114 'To agree to Improving Access to Social Housing';
- Item 01090 'To approve the submission document and sustainability appraisal for development in the Hetton Downs area to form part of the Council's Local Development Framework';
- Item 01316 'To agree Design Guide – Accommodation with Support'.

Councillor Rolph raised the matter of the Tyne and Wear Archives Joint Committee and suggested that this Scrutiny Committee should contribute to the discussion and feed in its views on the work of the Joint Committee. Councillor Rolph commented that she was not aware of the Joint Committee being scrutinised by any other body at all and perhaps this was a role that the Scrutiny Committee could take up.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny, advised that Councillor Rolph's requests in relation to the items on the Forward Plan, would be checked against the latest version and dealt with appropriately.

7. RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be received and noted.

Work Programme 2009-10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2009-10 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the Work Programme be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.