

**At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 12<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2010 at 6.00 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Bonallie, E. Gibson, Padgett, Wakefield and Wood

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A. Wright, Ball, Kelly, Tye and L. Walton.

**Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2010**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee were agreed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**Sunderland 'The Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Draft Scoping Report**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to put forward proposals and seek agreement from Members in relation to the forthcoming policy review into Sunderland 'The Place'.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman enquired if Members had any comments or if they were happy with the basic outline of the report.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the report was rather inward looking in terms of consultations and that we may need to look further afield.

Helen Lancaster, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, advised that officers were considering several pieces of research that had already been undertaken with people outside of Sunderland.

The Chairman commented that he had suggested consultation through Community Spirit and also door to door exercises in order to get opinion. The Committee may have to look at funding such tasks but the Chairman agreed that the consultation needed to be as external as possible.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that she was happy with the report and as time went on, the scope could be added to, if need be.

The Chairman proposed that consideration of the Task and Finish Groups be undertaken at the September meeting of the Committee.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) Members agree to the scope of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee's policy review for 2010/11 as outlined in the report; and
- ii) Members decide upon the membership of any Task and Finish Group deemed necessary to focus on specific work within the review that lends itself to that way of working at the September meeting of the Committee.

### **Highway Maintenance: Additional funding and the impact of the winter weather network**

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to:-

- i) Update the Committee on the proposed works for 2010/2011 in relation to the allocation of additional funds for Highway Maintenance.
- ii) Inform the Committee on the spend profile for footway and carriageway works from the mainstream capital and revenue budget for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.
- iii) Inform the Committee of the impact on the highway network caused by the exceptional winter weather.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Les Clark, Head of Street Scene, presented the report and referred to paragraph 6.4. Mr. Clark advised that since the writing of the report Sunderland had now received 50% of the £293,000 funding mentioned.

Councillor Wood requested further explanation in relation to the treatment type 'Trips' used in Appendix A and also why Sunderland North was not included in the list of regeneration areas detailed in Appendix B.

Mr. Clark advised that the treatment type 'trips' in Appendix A referred to rectification works which had been identified as hazards. Sunderland North was not included as Appendix B showed the overall allocation of the £400,000. It may have been that some of the treatments for Sunderland North had been included in Citywide budgets. Mr. Clark advised he would provide a breakdown of the costs for Councillor Wood.

In response to Councillor E. Gibson's query, Tim Smith, Deputy Highway Maintenance Manager, advised that the treatment type of 'miscellaneous' covered the small elements not included under a main treatment such as walls, planters, hard paved areas, etc.

3. RESOLVED that the Committee note the report and continue its support for additional funding in highway maintenance.

### **City of Sunderland Unitary Development Plan Alteration No. 2 (Central Sunderland): Arrangements for saving policies**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy attached) for the Committee to consider the report of the Deputy Chief Executive that was approved by Cabinet on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2010. The report attached as Appendix 1 was included on the agenda in order to allow the Committee to note and provide comment on the City of Sunderland Unitary Development Plan Alteration No. 2 (Central Sunderland): Arrangements for Saving Policies.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

In response to Councillor Wood's enquiry, the Chairman advised that he was not aware of any objections made by Cabinet.

Councillor Wakefield enquired as to what would happen if the Government did not accept the alterations.

Neil Cole, Planning Policy Manager, advised that a level of dialogue had taken place and given that there was no Regional Spatial Strategy, he believed the Government Office for the North East would favour the amendments.

4. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## **Condition of Fawcett Street**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with an action plan concerning the improvement to the condition of the Fawcett Street area, following a site visit undertaken by Members on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 and subsequent discussion at the Committee meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report and requested Members' endorsement for it to be put forward to Cabinet as part of the medium term financial strategy.

Councillor E. Gibson enquired if the private building owners had been consulted or if it was too early a stage.

Mr. Lowes advised that it was too early to do such consultation as it would only become a project once there had been a budget allocated.

Councillor Wood commented that in the current economic climate he anticipated the work would be phased over a longer period of time and enquired as to possible start dates and how it could be introduced.

Mr. Lowes informed the Committee that the order of introduction would depend on how much funding was available and when. If they were looking to potentially widen the footways, this could be the most expensive part of the scheme. If significant funding was available there could be a radical rethink of the junction at Burdon Road. If it was smaller phased funding, they could look at the St Thomas Street – Sunnyside junction.

Mr. Lowes also advised of ongoing discussions with the Bus Networks which used the key junction of Burdon Road and stressed that they were not considering reducing the number of buses, only changing the routes that they took.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Lowes for the report and commented that it was the best of its type he had seen, being very clear what could and could not be done. The Chairman also thanked Councillors E. Gibson, Wakefield and Wood for their work on the issue.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the Borough Road junction was key in finding the solution to the issue.

The Chairman agreed and commented that improvements to the street furniture of Fawcett Street was the quick win at the moment but there were other areas to look at.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and put forward to Cabinet as part of the medium term financial strategy.

## **Planning Application Consultation Process**

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with details of the planning application consultation process of the City Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Lowes advised Members that 17,900 neighbour consultations had been issued on 14,000 planning applications, with 129 press notices issued, at a cost of £20,553.

Mr. Lowes commented that the Council did try to strike the right balance between the cost of democracy and consultation, and for the most part they got it right, but were always willing to take suggestions on how to improve.

Mr. Lowes also advised that investigations were underway in using other publications than the Sunderland Echo for applications in the Washington area for instance. This may result in an increase of costs.

Councillor Wakefield commented that he found the department's new software was harder to perform searches with, compared to the previous system and also suggested that Members be informed of sensitive issues such as green belt applications, prior to consultations being carried out.

Mr. Lowes advised that the public access system was meant to be easier to use and if Members were having difficulties, the department were running training courses if required.

Mr. Lowes advised that they did consult with Members, but this tended to be on major cases and acknowledged that there should be consultation with Members prior to notices being issued on applications involving green belt issues, etc.

Councillor E. Gibson felt that the more sensitive cases needed a wider consultation rather than just the immediate neighbours of a proposed application.

Mr. Lowes commented that they had received criticism in the past, despite a large number of consultation letters having been distributed and also advised of the misconception that only people in receipt of letters could consult on the issue, which was not the case.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that sometimes people did not receive word of proposed applications until it was too late.

Councillor Wood commented that there was a long list of representatives that the Council consulted with and he felt as a general rule they did well in that area. Councillor Wood also felt that sometimes Ward Councillors may be more aware of the sensitivities of an application than the officers.

The Chairman submitted concerns on behalf of Councillor A. Wright in relation to the lack of consultation regarding the Rainton Bridge Development and requested Mr. Lowes respond to Councillor A. Wright outside of the meeting.

The Chairman commented that he believed the Council generally did well in regards to consultations, but when they got it wrong it was usually a major issue. The Chairman also commented that the Council tried to be as supportive of residents as possible.

Councillor Wakefield advised of a recent application in which the company had carried out a tremendous amount of consultation, yet people still claimed not to have known about the proposal. Councillor Wakefield believed that the mistake the Council made was relying on the Sunderland Echo which did not have as wide a circulation as people assumed.

Councillor Padgett advised that shops in certain Wards such as Washington North and Washington West did not sell the Sunderland Echo at all.

Mr. Lowes commented that this kind of guidance was helpful to the department in feeding into their review.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the period 1 July 2010 – 31 October 2010**

The Office of the Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider the items within the Committee's remit which were included in the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 July 2010 – 31 October 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Work Programme 2010-11**

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

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

(Signed) G. MILLER,  
Chairman.