

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the SUNDERLAND SOFTWARE CENTRE, TAVISTOCK PLACE, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 10TH JANUARY, 2017 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor David Snowdon in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Curran, M. Dixon, G. Galbraith, E. Gibson, Marshall, Porthouse, Taylor and Turner.

Also in attendance:-

Councillor Dianne Snowdon, Vice Chairman of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee
Ms Rebecca Ball, City of Culture Bid Director
Mrs Fiona Brown, Executive Director of People Services
Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer
Mrs Christine Tilley, Community Governance Services Team Leader
Mrs Berni Whitaker, Centres Manager, Sunderland Software Centre and Washington Business Centre

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Essl and W. Turton.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6th December 2016

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6th December, 2016 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6th December, 2016 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

UK City of Culture Bid 2021 – Progress Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to consider the background and current position in relation to the city's bid to be UK City of Culture 2021.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms Rebecca Ball, City of Culture Bid Director provided a presentation to the Committee on Sunderland's bid to become the UK City of Culture 2021. She advised that the decision had been taken due to the impact the title had had on Derry when it had won in 2013 and on Durham from where the Lumiere Light Festival had resulted, when the city had bid for the title in the same year, although it had been unsuccessful.

Ms Ball briefed Members on the timeline for the competition advising that the winning city would be announced in the winter of 2017. She reported that it was likely that Southampton and a Welsh city would enter the competition also. The North East had never had a European or UK City of Culture winner and Sunderland was currently second favourite to win at 4/1. Sunderland's City of Culture Bid was being written by a team from the University, the MAC Trust and the City Council and lessons were being taken on board from how Hull had been successful in winning the competition for the UK City of Culture for 2017. Ms Ball referred Members to the 2021 financial targets advising that an initial bid of £3m had been set and briefed the Committee as to how the Team were looking to raise the funding.

In response to Members, Ms Ball advised that Perth was the current favourite, however she felt Coventry or Paisley had a better chance of winning than Perth and that Leicester had been the favourite.

Ms Ball assured the Committee that all aspects and assets of the City's Cultural offer from all parts of the city's area including Washington and the Coalfields would be taken into consideration in the Bid and in response to Councillor Turner, she advised that she would check that the Coalfields Area and namely Hetton was represented on the Team to ensure that nothing was missed.

Ms Ball confirmed that the International Advanced Manufacturing Park and the investment, innovation and inventiveness it represented would be included in the Bid as well as the development in the city as part of the Minster Quarter Masterplan. She felt that the fact that all of this development was not in place but was planned, would be more powerful, as the focus would be on the difference it would make.

The Team was looking to contact all kinds of organisations to get involved as well as local champions, friends and ambassadors for the city. There was also 'Team 21' which was a group of Young People who would be 21 in 2021 from all areas of the city which had been created. The Bid would also be ramped up in the media to increase community engagement and support.

The Bid Team were also working with the Team responsible for the arrangements for the Tall Ships Races which was coming to Sunderland in 2018 which could prove to be an important stepping stone for the Culture Bid by providing valuable experience to build on when looking at infrastructure for the event, music and street culture and use of the riverside.

Mrs Fiona Brown, Executive Director of People Services commented that one of the most important things would be the legacy of the Culture Bid for the City and also from the Tall Ships Races. In respect of the Tall Ships, one of the important things coming out of the Tall Ships held at Blyth, Northumberland was the creation of volunteers and plans to create volunteers in Sunderland, it was hoped, could be

trialled at the Sunderland International Airshow later in the year. It would also be important for the City to benefit from a financial legacy from the Culture Bid.

Full consideration having been given to the report, the Chairman having thanked the Officers for their attendance and expressed the Committee's desire for an update later in the year, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the information detailed above be received and noted.

Business Centres Overview – Progress Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing an update on e-Volve Business Centre, Sunderland Software Centre and Washington Business Centre.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mrs Berni Whitaker, Centres Manager, Sunderland Software Centre and Washington Business Centre briefed the Committee on the information contained in the report regarding the Council's three business centres advising that business support, information and advice were available to the companies located in the centres from the Council's Business Investment Team. Mrs Whitaker added that the projected occupancy level for the Software Centre in 2019/20 was 90-96%.

In response to Councillor Porthouse who asked how much the Software Centre cost the Council and whether it was value for money, Mrs Whitaker advised that e-Volve had just started to make a small profit after being there for 10 years and its running costs were around £600,000 per year. Washington Business Centre was funded from Europe and its running costs were £450,000 and The Software Centre cost from £750,000-£800,000 per year. In order to get 100% occupancy in the Software Centre as quickly as possible, work was being undertaken to promote it in the best possible way including promotion on the 'Make It' website, which had just been redeveloped to make it more accessible and the Business Investment Team were also looking at more creative ways to rent out the available space.

In response to Councillor Dixon, Mrs Whitaker advised that the occupancy rate at the Centre had risen from 52% in June 2016 to 61% at present. It was difficult to say whether the fact the Business Investment Team was located at the Centre, was key to this as some businesses wanted the support and some didn't. However, it came down to maximising the available space and there might come a time when the Business Investment Team and Sunderland Live needed to move out of the Centre so that this office space could be rented out. At the moment the focus had to be on getting software companies to rent offices at the Centre under the terms of the ERDF.

Mrs Whitaker added that she would be happy to bring a further report to a future meeting of the Committee on the progress being made and detailing further information Members had sought through their questioning.

Full consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the information detailed above be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2016/17

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), attaching for Members' information, a copy of the current work programme for the Committee's work during the 2016-17 Council Year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer referred the Committee to the work plan for the year ahead. He confirmed that Mr John Seager, Chief Executive of Siglione would be in attendance to provide a progress report at the February meeting; the item had been deferred from that evening's agenda to allow sufficient discussion on the City of Culture Bid and the Business Centres report. He advised that the Committee would also receive a progress report on Key Cities at the next meeting.

Mr Diamond added that the February date for the Minister Quarter Masterplan was speculative and that he was in discussion in respect of the date for a report on the Business Improvement District to be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

Full consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme and detailed above be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

A report providing an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from 13th December 2016 (copy circulated), was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer invited Members to raise any issues on the items coming forward to the Cabinet for consideration and he would endeavour to provide further information.

Councillor Porthouse referred to a proposed decision to be taken in respect of IT Infrastructure at Moorside following the major ICT incident which had occurred in September. He commented that there had been nothing added to the Scrutiny Committee's calendar on the major ICT incident despite him having requested a report be submitted to the Committee to provide an explanation in view of the cost to the Council of the systems failure.

The Chairman advised that he had raised the issue with Councillor Norma Wright, Chairman of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee who did not feel it should come to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration as it was not within the Committee's remit.

Full consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

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

(Signed) D. SNOWDON,
Chairman.