

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 14TH JULY, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

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

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Walton and Wares.

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15th June, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 5 – Empire Theatre Annual Report

Councillors J. Scott, Tate and S. Watson declared personal interests as Council appointed Members of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

**Response from Cabinet – 3rd June, 2009
Policy Review – A Place to Play – A Review of Music Venues in
Sunderland**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 3rd June, 2009, which considered the Culture and Leisure Review Committee's policy report into music venues in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Review Co-ordinator, commented that the report had been well received by the Cabinet and that the first report monitoring the policy review recommendations would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its September meeting. A copy of the policy review final report would be circulated to all Members of the Committee in due course.

2. RESOLVED that the response of the Cabinet on the policy review into music venues in Sunderland be noted.

Empire Theatre Annual Report

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating Members of the work ongoing within Sunderland Empire Theatre and the monitoring systems currently in place to ensure the highest quality of service is achieved within the Theatre.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Vicki Medhurst, Principal Librarian, Culture and Tourism, proceeded to brief the Committee on the report and referred Members to the annual performance list and figures detailed at Appendix II. She advised that ticket sales of 15,000 had already been achieved for the 2009 pantomime Peter Pan. Ms. Medhurst highlighted the education and outreach work undertaken by Live Nation detailed at paragraph 3.3 of the report. She advised that in relation to the Arts Council's new free theatre initiative, 500 free tickets had been given out in Sunderland and the theatre was on target to give away 2,000 tickets in the next two years.

In relation to the Dr. Gilbert Fund, there were now over 20 schools taking part.

In response to the comment made by Councillor J. Scott that Live Nation were dispensing with a number of theatres in the light of the current economic climate, Ms. Medhurst assured Members that there was a management contract in place with Sunderland. The Theatre was owned by the City Council and the City Council would have to approve any takeover and they would in any case have to adhere to the Council's terms and conditions.

Councillor Foster congratulated everyone involved with the Theatre which he hailed as one of the successes of the Council and a shining light to what Sunderland offered.

In response to an enquiry from Council Rolph concerning the free theatre initiative, Ms. Medhurst advised that the free tickets were allocated over a range of age groups and that young people needed to apply.

Councillor Rolph added that she would be interested to find out whether the scheme targetted people from disadvantaged areas and also, whether Live Nation worked with the Children's Services Directorate as well as other

education providers. Finally, she asked whether the Theatre was a fair trade venue and, if not, urged that this be considered.

Ms. Medhurst advised that Live Nation was working with the Library service and different partners such as Tyne and Wear Museums, however, she would make enquiries and provide the information requested to Councillor Rolph on the issues raised.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired as to the financial situation of the Theatre.

Ms. Medhurst stated that the Council paid a management fee to Live Nation to manage and operate the Theatre and that as far as the Council was aware Live Nation was flourishing.

In response to Councillor Errington, Ms. Medhurst advised that there was a wide ranging programme of shows staged at the Theatre which was detailed as part of the current management agreement between Live Nation and the Council. She added that she was sure Live Nation would book shows in the area where the demand was.

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

3. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and that an update on the Sunderland Empire Theatre be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

Policy Development and Review 2009/10 Scope

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) putting forward proposals and seeking agreement from Members in relation to the forthcoming policy review into Access to Housing.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, briefed the Committee on the report and referred Members to the proposed terms of reference for the Scrutiny Policy Review detailed at paragraph 5 of the report as follows:-

- (a) To provide a national and local context to the availability of housing in the City;
- (b) To consider the current ways by which people access social housing in the City;
- (c) To identify and highlight the issues relating to how people access housing in the City;
- (d) To look at what services are available to support people to access housing;

- (e) To investigate how the Council and its partners work together;
- (f) To look at the potential impact of Choice Based Lettings on how people access housing;
- (g) To ensure that a single route in to housing is attained so that improved customer outcomes are achieved;
- (h) To consider examples of best practice and innovative provision from local authorities and other key stakeholders across the country in relation to access to housing.

Mr. Caddick emphasised the importance of (g).

Members were in agreement that this was a key issue.

Mr. Caddick pointed out that it must be acknowledged that any new supply of housing would take many years to come to fruition and therefore the key driver for the review would be looking at how people access the housing that we already have. He advised that a meeting had been held with Registered Social Landlords and it had been accepted that one approach to access housing was needed. However, as some were national organisations dealing with various local authorities this may be an issue. Further meetings would be held with the group to link into the Scrutiny Committee's review.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor J. Scott, Mr. Caddick advised that in relation to the information on the Local Context detailed in the report, from the 17 households in Sunderland living in temporary accommodation that this included 2 who were in bed and breakfast accommodation. He added that there had been significant impact in decreasing homelessness in Sunderland and that focus had been on prevention by working with people at an early stage and that efforts would continue this year; stretched targets to reduce homelessness in the City having been set. Work had also been done to bring back 390 empty properties back into use by working with landlords in order to help reduce housing waiting lists.

In response to Councillor M. Dixon, Mr. Caddick commented that there was a balance to be struck in meeting local people's needs and also the need to attract people into the City to achieve City outcomes.

Councillor Rolph referred to the list of potential witnesses detailed at paragraph 6.4 and suggested the following additions that may be appropriate:-

- the Cabinet Members with Portfolios for Prosperous City and Responsive Services due to the overlap in their respective remits with that of the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Sustainable Communities;

- the Regional Development Agency;
- the Homes and Communities Agency.

In response to Councillor Ellis' enquiry concerning empty properties, Mr. Caddick advised that every property was mapped on the GIS property system and returns were made to Government on an annual basis.

In relation to the Homes and Communities Agency, he advised that a financial appraisal had been completed based on 18 sites put forward in the City. A meeting had been arranged to assess what this meant for Sunderland. This was an opportunity for the Council to help with housing in the City. It linked to the City Housing Investment Plan which would look at what the City Council, Gentoo and other housing providers can do and sits alongside the Economic Masterplan. Mr. Caddick stated that he would be happy to bring more detail on the above matters to the Scrutiny Committee.

4. RESOLVED that the scope of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee's policy review for 2009/10 as outlined the report be approved, together with the inclusion of the additional witnesses to the potential list of witnesses and the further information detailed above.

Work Programme 2009-10

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

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Rolph having proposed that climate change and the Sunderland Strategic Corridor be included in the Committee's Work Plan in relation to the Committee's remit of sustainability overview, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme be noted and that the above items be included.

Forward Plan

The Chief executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st July to 31st October, 2009 and seeking the views of Members on the value of the Committee continuing to receive the Forward Plan on a regular basis.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members commented that they found the opportunity to look at the Forward Plan useful.

6. RESOLVED that it be noted that the following entries were proposed as being issues in relation to which Scrutiny could add value, were of interest to the Committee and were under the remit of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee and that the Committee continue to receive the Forward Plan on a regular basis:-

- No. 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.
- No. 01134 To consider the outcome of exhibitions and consultation on parking management schemes for the Royal Hospital and Stadium of Light.
- No. 01241 To approve the amended Stadium Village Development Framework and adopt it as a Supplementary Planning Document.
- No. 01227 To approve a Young Persons Supported Housing Project.
- No. 01273 To approve the development of a supported housing unit for people who misuse alcohol.
- No. 01269 To agree the award of a short term waste contract.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.