

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY 9TH JULY, 2019 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. Turner in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Blackett, M. Dixon, Fagan, Foster, Jackson, Jenkins, Marshall, Scullion, Taylor and Thornton

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Phil Scott, Principal Environmental Health Officer

Mr Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11th June 2019

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11th June, 2019 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11th June, 2019 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy

The Director of People, Communications and Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), for the Committee to consider the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy for the regulation of housing and housing management standards in the private rented sector.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Phil Scott, Principal Environmental Health Officer presented the report and was on hand to answer Members queries.

In response to Councillor Fagan's enquiry over the sharing of information with other authorities, Mr Scott advised that whilst South Tyneside had not adopted the policy yet, prosecutions could be taken into account from other areas during our investigations.

Councillor Jackson referred to paragraph 4.7 of the report and requested examples of how the income generated from the issue of civil penalties would be spent on improving private sector housing working practices.

Mr Scott informed the Committee that this was an unknown quantity at the moment and could be wide ranging in tackling a host of issues in the area such as Anti Social Behaviour or the possible funding of staff.

Councillor Jackson commented that it would be good to find out when this would be used and also queried what plans there were to work with the landlords of student accommodation as this was a very transient population and if the policy covered this. Mr Scott advised that each case would be reviewed on its own merits.

Councillor M. Dixon queried if this policy had risen due to Government legislation and the growth of the private sector. Mr Scott advised that the policy was direct from government legislation and to make sure all landlords were dealt with on a level playing field.

Mr Scott also advised Councillor M. Dixon that the reaction to this policy from landlords had been mixed but generally supportive and that it was correct that the local authority could face penalties if they did not carry out their statutory duties.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that the Portfolio Holder had recently undertaken to bring all empty properties back into use and enquired if this policy would help to address this problem and bring properties back into use. Mr Scott advised that it was very difficult to get empty properties back into use but this policy did include scope for enforced sales, if the property has a negative impact upon neighbours so whilst it was not a one size fits all, but multiple strands approach.

Mr Scott advised that they would target resources where the biggest problems were and what positive impact the policy could have through data reviews rather than on a ward to ward basis.

In response to Councillor Foster's enquiry, Mr Scott advised that the policy could include tenant behaviour on a case by case basis and could be dealt with by Council legislation through a combined approach to address poor behaviour.

With regards to the Chairman's query, Mr Scott informed that not all HMO's required a license as it was those with three or more stories and that they inspect these at least once per five year tenure. The license could be revoked if necessary.

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

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

Cross Border Taxi Licensing Enforcement

The Director of People, Communications and Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) for the Committee to consider the proposals for the Council to enter into arrangements with other local authorities in the North East region to facilitate cross border licensing enforcement

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Scott also presented this report and was on hand to answer Members queries.

In response to Councillor Marshall's query, Mr Scott advised that as a licensed authority, Uber could still be inspected as part of this enforcement.

Councillor M .Dixon enquired if there had been a massive problem in Sunderland with regards to taxi's not meeting the requirements. Mr Scott informed that he did not have the exact figures to hand but he would look into this and supply Councillor Dixon with these directly.

Councillor Taylor enquired as to any joint collaborative working with the DVSA and also suggested a campaign with the Environment Agency over the enforcement of HGV lorries. Mr Scott advised that they had worked in partnerships in relation to vehicles that might not be insured and that a campaign with the Environment Agency could be something to consider.

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

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

Annual Work Programme 2019-20

The Director of People, Communications and Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), setting out the current work programme of the Committee for the 2019-20 Municipal year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that the Coastal Communities report would be presented at the next meeting along with a report on Siglion as per Members request.

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2019-2020 be noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Director of People, Communications and Partnerships submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from 17th June, 2019 (copies circulated).

(For copy report and notice – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer reminded Members to contact him if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

With regards to the consideration of investment partner proposals for the funding of office and other developments on the vaux site, Councillor M. Dixon enquired if Members would be at liberty to ask questions on this due to the confidentiality involved in such topics.

Mr Diamond advised that he would seek to clarify the situation on Councillor Dixon's behalf.

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

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

(Signed) D. TURNER,
Chairman.