

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 2010 at 3.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Copeland, D. Forbes, M. Forbes, P. Gibson, L. Martin, Mordey, J. Scott, Walker and T. Wright.

Also present:-

Councillor P. Watson	-	Leader of the Council
Councillor Anderson	-	Deputy Leader of the Council
Councillor Allan	-	Portfolio Holder for Resources
Councillor Blackburn	-	Portfolio Holder for Attractive and Inclusive City
Councillor Charlton	-	Portfolio Holder for Prosperous City
Councillor Trueman	-	Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities
Councillor D. Wilson	-	Portfolio Holder for Safer City
Councillor N. Wright	-	Portfolio Holder for Healthy City
Councillor Ball	-	Vice Chairman of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Heron	-	Chairman of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee
Councillor S. Watson	-	Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Barkess and also on behalf of Councillor Gofton, Portfolio Holder for Responsive Services and Customer Care and Councillor P. Smith, Portfolio Holder for Children and Learning City, together with the following Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen:-

Councillor Arnott, Vice Chairman for Prosperity and Economic Development;

Councillor Errington, Vice Chairman for Sustainable Communities;

Councillors Miller and Wakefield, Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively for Environment and Attractive City;

Councillors Stewart and A. Hall, Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively for Children, Young People and Learning; and

Councillor Shattock, Vice Chairman of Health and Wellbeing.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 21st January, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21st January, 2010 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 4 – Reference from Cabinet – 2nd February and 10th February, 2010 – Budget Service Reports

In accordance with Part 5 – [Part 2, Paragraph 11(b)] of the Council's Constitution, the following Councillors declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the item as a Member of the Cabinet and left the meeting having addressed questions from Members of the Committee in respect of their presentation and prior to any deliberation:-

Councillors Allan, Anderson, Blackburn, Charlton, Trueman, D. Wilson, N. Wright and P. Watson.

Councillor Tate declared personal interests as a Governor of Hetton School in relation to Building Schools for the Future, a member of Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust, a Member of Hetton Town Council, the Chair of Hetton Homecare Voluntary Management Committee, a member of G.M.B. in relation to Single Status issues, a member of the Local Government Pension Schemes, a Director of Newcastle Airport, as his wife works at Easington Lane School, as a Council appointed representative on Easington Lane Access Point and as a member of the National Association of Councillors.

Councillor M. Forbes declared a personal interest as a Governor of St. Anthony's School.

Councillor P. Gibson declared a personal interest as Chairman of the Governors of Farrington Community School.

Item 7 – Approval of Funding Arrangements with the Homes and Communities Agency and One North East for Strategic Regeneration Purposes – Call-in of Decision.

In accordance with Part 5 – [Part 2, Paragraph 11(b)] of the Council's Constitution, Councillors Allan and P. Watson declared personal and prejudicial interests in the item as a Member of the Cabinet and left the meeting having addressed questions from Members of the Committee in respect of the decision taken by the Cabinet on 3rd February, 2010 in relation to the above report and prior to any deliberations.

Call-in of Decision – Urgent Business

The Chairman reported that a call-in had been received from the following Members of the Committee:-

- Councillor Lee Martin;
- Councillor Margaret Forbes;
- Councillor Angela Barkess.

He advised that the call-in asked the Committee to review the executive decision taken by the Cabinet on 3rd February, 2010 to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Director of Financial Resources and the Chief Solicitor, to enter into the appropriate funding agreements to secure funding for the acquisition of a key regeneration site.

The Chairman advised that he had agreed to add this to the Committee's agenda as urgent business in accordance with Section 100(B) of the Local Government Act 1972 by reason of special circumstances related to the timescales involved in the funding agreement.

Variation of Agenda

The Chairman reported he was proposing to vary the agenda in order to consider the call-in as the first item of business. The report had been circulated under Part II of the agenda as the Committee was considered likely to exclude the public during consideration thereof as it contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 3).

The Chairman advised that Officers had prepared a report which had been tabled at the meeting which set out the parts of the report that could be considered in public.

The Chairman stated that the Committee needed to consider whether the call-in should be heard in public or private session. He stated that he was proposing that the Committee considered the call-in in public. He pointed out that this would require Members to honour the trust placed in them to ensure that no information about the potential value of the site, or the details of negotiations, was provided or asked for while the meeting was open to the public.

He stated that Members must understand that any breach of that confidentiality would be a matter for the Standards Committee. He added that all Members must watch for the risk that confidential information might be disclosed. If the discussion could not usefully be had in public, the Committee would need to move into private session.

Councillor L. Martin welcomed the proposal to consider the report in public and commented that as long as the funding amounts were redacted that he felt there was nothing else that could not be discussed in public.

Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Chief Solicitor, confirmed that details of the funding arrangements and negotiations needed to be preserved as confidential.

Ms. Janet Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive, stated that there were no issues in connection with naming the organisations involved as this information was in the public domain, however, the funding amounts were not and this should not be discussed in public.

2. RESOLVED that the agenda be varied accordingly and that the Call-in of Decision be now considered and that it be held in public subject to Members observing that no information about the potential value of the site be disclosed or details of the negotiations be provided or asked for.

Approval of Funding Arrangements with the Homes and Communities Agency and One North East for Strategic Regeneration Purposes – Call-in of Decision

The Chief Executive and Chief Solicitor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) for the Committee to review the executive decision taken on 3rd February, 2010 in relation to the above matter.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 2.2 concerning exempt information and the application of the public interest test.

The Chairman invited the two Members present who had called-in the decision to explain their reasons for believing the Principles of Decision Making had not been followed.

Councillor L. Martin queried the certainty of funding, referring to four different tranches over a four year period and commented that in his opinion, no Government agency could guarantee funding or give any assurance beyond 2010/2011 as whatever Government was to take charge this year would undertake a funding review. He enquired therefore how guaranteed the funding was. He sought clarification around the discussions concerning the continuation of One North East, and assurances and clarification around the money the Council was prepared to lend to One North East.

Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Chief Solicitor, advised the Committee that any further level of detail in respect of the funding arrangements was not suitable for discussion in public as it would inevitably lead to discussions on the negotiations around funding.

Councillor Martin asked for clarification as to why the Homes and Communities Agency were to be involved and what were the arrangements as to their engagement.

Ms. Hood advised that this information was related to joint venture arrangements and not current to this discussion.

Councillor Martin stated that the entire deal was dependent upon the Council getting its money back and asked what guarantee there was that this would happen as this was in the public interest.

Councillor M. Forbes stated there was uncertainty around the funding arrangements and asked whether it would not be better for the Council to take the burden and therefore be able to call more of the shots by using the strategic investment reserve in order to secure the acquisition of the regeneration site.

The Chairman reminded Councillors Martin and Forbes of the need to follow the process and to explain why they felt the principles of decision making had not been followed.

Councillor M. Forbes stated that there was a need to show clarity of aims and desired outcomes. There was a degree of uncertainty as to what the ultimate success of the proposed partnership would be.

The Leader of the Council expressed concern that Councillor Martin had disclosed some of the detail around the funding arrangements after Members had specifically being warned that this type of disclosure would not be in the public interest for the reasons stated in the report. He felt that Councillor Martin was raising spurious concerns, that he had breached confidentiality and this merited reporting to the Standards Committee.

Councillor Allan commented that every Member of the Council was able to discuss confidential matters with relevant officers. Councillor Martin could have chosen to seek the information he needed around the proposed funding arrangements without calling in the decision, however, he had chosen to do this and was now preventing the Council from moving forward in respect of this key regeneration site.

Councillor T. Wright commented that he felt that the funding arrangements would lead to the Council securing a valuable asset and that there was a sound business case for this. The land was standing empty. He could not see anything wrong with the decision taken by the Cabinet and it was a win win situation for the City.

Councillor Gibson stated that the Members concerned had still not explained why they considered that the principles of good decision making had not been satisfied, and proposed that the Committee proceed to decide the issue.

Councillor Martin repeated that there was no certainty around the funding. It was of huge interest to the City what happened on the Vaux site and the amounts involved. There were no assurances around any of the questions he was asking.

Councillor Forbes queried why the report had not been included on Part I of the Cabinet agenda without the detail of the funding amounts and arrangements as had been the case with the report on the joint venture agreement which had been made public after the negotiations had been finalised. She stated that the Council was being thrust into this one without the necessary information.

Ms. Hood advised that to discuss the matter at any further level of detail Members would need the call-in to be discussed in private session. She stated that the first point to decide on was in relation to the merits of the decision making.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor P. Watson, commented that the joint venture was legitimate and that further information around the funding arrangements would be available when the matter was no longer commercially sensitive. However, public disclosure would at this point in time be detrimental to the public interest as it would decrease the prospects of bringing the site into public ownership which was key to bringing the development forward.

Councillor Allan commented that he was convinced that the decision had been taken in the best interests of the principles of decision-making. Appropriate advice had been taken by Cabinet from officers who had acted appropriately at all times and he asked the Committee to endorse the decision of the Cabinet.

The Chairman commented that he felt it was a major step forward to acquire the Vaux site.

Councillor Martin repeated that he did not believe any assurances had been provided and if it were necessary to hold the meeting in camera in order to do this he felt this should be done. The decision involved a huge amount of money and if it was necessary to hold the discussion in private to find out the detail of the funding arrangements then this should take place in private.

Councillor L. Martin moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor M. Forbes that the discussions be held in camera to get the assurances in respect of the development and address all aspects of uncertainty.

Members having been reminded that the Committee's decision must be made in the absence of Members involved in the decision under consideration, the Leader of the Council, Councillor P. Watson, Councillor Allan, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Cabinet Members in attendance, withdrew from the meeting in order to allow the Committee to make its decision.

Upon a vote being taken the motion was defeated with 2 Members voting in favour thereof and 7 against.

The Chairman moved that in the light of what had been heard, that recommendation 1 detailed at paragraph 5.1 be approved.

Upon a vote being taken, the motion was carried with 7 Members voting in favour thereof and 2 against.

3. RESOLVED that having reviewed the decision taken by the Cabinet on 3rd February 2010, that the Scrutiny Committee believed the decision is appropriate (and therefore should be implemented without further delay).

Reference from Cabinet – 3rd February and 10th February, 2010 – Budget Service Reports

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report seeking the Committee's advice and consideration on a number of reports (copies circulated) which were considered by the Cabinet at its meetings held on 3rd and 10th February, 2010:-

- (A) Final Revenue Support Grant Settlement 2010/2011;
- (B) Collection Fund 2009/2010;
- (C)
 - a. Capital Programme including Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy;
 - b. Revenue Budget and Proposed Council Tax 2010/2011;
 - c. Draft Council Tax Leaflet 2010/2011.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Leader of the Council provided the Committee with a brief presentation on the strategic priorities within his portfolio as follows:-

- the Community Leadership Programme;
- performance improvement and the CAA;
- strategic developments, inward investment and the International Strategy;
- the investment in Scrutiny.

The Deputy Leader of the Council paid tribute to the Leader in respect of his leadership in promoting Sunderland's interests and proceeded to brief the Committee on the responsibilities within her portfolio as follows:-

- the economic masterplan;
- community cohesion;
- the equalities and diversity agenda;
- partnership working including the LSP and the ARC.

The Deputy Leader commented that Sunderland had achieved a great deal, however, there was an awareness of the areas highlighted in the CAA and the Council was looking at the broader picture in working to make the City a place where people wanted to live, work and visit.

Councillor Gibson referred to the key medium term priorities and commented on the importance of developing measures to increase the level of business activity and stimulate sustainable economic interest and investment in the City.

Councillor M. Forbes commented that she was in full support of all economic growth, however, the point of bringing the call-in considered earlier on the agenda was the uncertainty around the funding. She added that all parties were united in wanting the best for the City, however, they had different ways of achieving their aim.

Councillor T. Wright commented that he thought it was an excellent Capital and Revenue Programme. He fully supported the Deputy Leader in her commitment to

diversity issues and commented that she should be encouraged and supported with this.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Deputy Leader for their contributions.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Allan, then proceeded to address the Committee and briefed Members on the key strategic priorities for which he was responsible, including:-

- overall responsibility for the efficient, co-ordinated management and use of all the Council's key resources;
- budgeting and financial affairs;
- reviewing procurement procedures for the Council and regionally;
- the Buy in Sunderland First Campaign;
- e-government – making services more accessible;
- Legal and Democratic Services – Member ICT facilities, updating the Committee rooms, review of Members' Support Services;
- strategic management of Council land, buildings and other assets including the port;
- corporate personnel matters – Single Status, working with the Trades Unions, Single Status II negotiations, the Sunderland Way of Working;
- Corporate ICT matters – Digital Challenge, the new website.

The Chairman commented that Councillor Allan was recognised for the work he was undertaking in relation to the Council's financial matters.

In response to Councillor Copeland, Councillor Allan stated that there was no intention to force Members to use blackberrys but that staff would work with Councillors to provide help and support to enable and encourage them to make best use of the technology available. However, if any Member still did not want to have this equipment, they would not be forced to.

Councillor M. Forbes stated that Government had said that Single Status I would be cost neutral and enquired whether the cost was available.

Councillor Allan advised that an evaluation of jobs had been undertaken and in those cases where the jobs were evaluated to be worth a lower pay grade, the job descriptions were looked at and responsibilities adjudged to ensure each role was appropriate to the grade.

Mr. Keith Beardmore, Director of Financial Resources, advised that implementation in October 2005 had cost £4.3M, £2.7M for schools and £1.5M in respect of the rest

of the Council. This had been fully reflected in the base budget as were the enhanced roles which Councillor Allan had referred to.

Councillor M. Forbes asked that where additional responsibility had been taken from one post to another, whether there had been a reduction in posts.

Councillor Allan stated that the Council had achieved a massively increased efficient service. There had been some reduction in the number of jobs, however, no compulsory redundancies and the Council had maintained good services with the lowest Council tax.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Allan for his presentation.

The Chairman advised that as the Portfolio Holder for Children and Learning City, Councillor P. Smith was away on Council business, the Leader of the Council had agreed to brief the Committee in relation to the key aspects of the portfolio.

The Leader was accompanied by Ms. Meg Boustead, Head of Safeguarding. The Leader stated that the following were key priorities:-

- safeguarding and securing the wellbeing of children and young people;
- corporate parenting, looked after children, the number of which was rising;
- reduction of child poverty;
- delivering Building Schools for the Future;
- managing the supply of school places;
- developing the potential of children and young people through education, training, personal development to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training;
- promoting good health and reducing the under 18 conception rate and childhood obesity;
- protecting children and young people from harm by e.g. increasing the number of social care workers and implementing a foster care strategy; and
- continuing to raise standards at Key Stage 4 and narrow the gap.

The Chairman commented that through BSF and the renewal of primary schools all wards had seen an improvement in academic results and that children reacted to better surroundings.

Councillor T. Wright noted that with regard to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), the CAA had been happy with the direction of travel and enquired what progress had been made.

The Leader advised that the NEETs figures had reduced from 1,410 to approximately 800 which was somewhere around the national average. He added that buildings were not everything, however, the new modern schools with the best ICT must be an improvement for pupils from the old Victorian schools with leaky roofs.

Councillor Copeland asked if the NEETs figure could be produced on a ward by ward basis.

Ms. Boustead stated that it was possible to identify schools.

Councillor M. Forbes commented that with regard to training it was important that young people were trained to do the jobs that were needed.

Ms. Boustead advised that emphasis was on apprenticeships and getting young people into sustainable employment.

The Leader added that the strategy for the future was that the North East was able to retain and get jobs to the region. Software City, for example, was almost totally graduates. Decent paid jobs were needed so that the people doing them spend their money in the City. As a region, employers were being considered to see what kind of jobs the area was short of so that training was provided to tailor to the needs of the City and the region.

Councillor M. Forbes referred to the promotion of young people's good health quoting Chlamydia, alcohol and drugs as threats to this and asked how the Council was tackling these issues and what work was being done with partners.

The Leader advised that in relation to drugs and alcohol the Council was working with the Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust (STPCT). Ms. Nonnie Crawford, Director of Public Health, was the "alcohol champion" and was working to raise awareness that alcohol abuse was a severe problem.

Sexual health, testing was being promoted and the Council was tackling obesity by providing healthy school meals and promoting healthy eating as well as its investment in Wellness Centres and the two new swimming pools.

Ms. Boustead advised that Mr. Mark Hopkinson of the STPCT was leading on the Health Improvement Plan. Reducing obesity was the main strand to this. Substance misuse and alcohol were being tackled in a joined up way by working with Adult Services and looking at the impact on younger children of parent substance misuse.

Councillor Copeland asked how successful the Council was in recruiting foster parents.

The Leader advised that extra provision had been made of £140,000 in the budget for this.

Ms. Boustead stated that the Council always had a turnover. Foster carers were paid an allowance. They were difficult to recruit to, however, the retention rate was good. Voluntary foster carers were generally very loyal.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for his contribution.

Councillor Charlton, Portfolio Holder for Prosperous City, briefed the Committee on the key areas of his portfolio.

Councillor Charlton advised that work was focussing on the physical regeneration of the City, planning and the Corporate Improvement Plan priorities relating to the City Centre, together with economic development and drawing in European funding for Tyne and Wear. The Seafront Strategy was also a current priority and Stadium Park was a further development for the City. He added that Sunderland was doing well despite the economic climate, and work was continuing in relation to business investment.

Councillor Charlton commented that Sunderland had bucked the trend in that unemployment had not increased as much as in other areas.

Councillor J. Scott enquired how difficult it was at the moment to bring in businesses due to the economic downturn.

Councillor Charlton commented that developers only came for profit. Banks were not lending money at the moment. However, a lot of time was still being invested in trying to bring in developers and Sunderland was not any worse off in this respect than anywhere else.

Councillor Mordey welcomed the public realm work which was being undertaken at the moment in the Sunnyside area of the City and stated that it was excellent to see through the Seafront Strategy that one of the City's main assets was getting investment.

Councillor Charlton advised that the Seafront Strategy was a long term strategy. £1,848,000 was being spent on the seafront this year.

Councillor M. Forbes commented on the number of empty shops in the City and that this was creating a bad impression. She asked whether there were any contingency plans to fill the empty units on a temporary basis in order to stop the look of dereliction.

Councillor Charlton advised that this needed to be looked at but it was not unique to Sunderland. He added that not all the properties belonged to the Council. Where possible, efforts were made to encourage businesses to set up. He was aware that Land Securities, for example, was giving rent rebates for business in their shops in order to help them in the current economic climate.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Charlton for his presentation.

Councillor N. Wright, Portfolio Holder for Healthy City, briefed Members on the key responsibilities for her portfolio, including:-

- adult social care services;
- the strategic partnership with the TPCT and other partners to promote public health and wellness;
- specialist housing support services and provision.

Councillor Wright advised that the priorities for 2010/2011 where provision had been made in the budget for delivery were:-

- free personal care – to be in place by October 2010 – any financial implications for the Council to be met and arrangements put in place;
- implementation of a new assessment model for adult social care;
- a range of housing options for vulnerable people, including those with learning disabilities of which extra care homes was one;
- working with the Home Improvement Agency, providing loans to make homes safe and secure;
- disabled facilities grants to ensure people are able to remain in their own homes;
- safeguarding in terms of home care, quality standards to improve the quality of life for vulnerable people.

Councillor P. Gibson commented that the new extra care home, Beckwith Mews, was fantastic. He asked if it was known whether Gentoo was to be a partner in any future extra care housing schemes.

Mr. Neil Revely, Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services advised that the fourth extra care housing scheme was being developed with Gentoo. Discussions were ongoing with others. Gentoo was refurbishing homes and was not ruling out partnership with the Council. They knew the Council's plans were to develop 1,400 units over the next 6-7 years.

Councillor Copeland commented that it was Government policy to keep as many people living in their own home as possible rather than in a residential home. Funding free home care, although a financial burden for the Council, would mean people would get the correct care they needed.

The Leader of the Council commented that Adult Care was a massively volatile budget. The Council had made a prudent provision and projection forward as to how much this would cost. It was anticipated that Sunderland would get £1.2M from Government for this and there was £1M in contingencies for the service. No-one, though, could guarantee that demand would not be greater than had been provided for.

Mr. Revely added that the Council had predicted the demand and the cost of care for the next 25 years as far as it was able to and provision had been made in the

Council's Plan. Councillor Wright had addressed the quality issue where increased emphasis was being put on quality through the Scrutiny Review in order to improve services which were already good. In the past the Council had spent too much on residential care but this was not where people wanted to live. The Council was investing in community services so it could disinvest in residential services. A Green Paper was currently being consulted on, trying to get a consensus on how to fund personal care.

Councillor M. Forbes commented that Councils would need to pick up $\frac{1}{3}$ of the cost of free personal care with Government paying for $\frac{2}{3}$ of the cost. This was a considerable problem for budgeting and difficult to predict. It would be an ongoing problem and would need updating as to how it was going. Providers would need to be commissioned to provide the care. Councillor Forbes asked whether there was any indication of whether there would be any difficulty in getting someone to provide the service and whether the provision for those who have mental health problems was adequate in Sunderland now.

Mr. Revely stated that the unknown in the budget was information about those accessing care by their own means. He had looked at this three times to get a good estimate but there would still be those people who the Council was unaware of. Funding had been added to contingencies in case it was needed. Once the arrangements were in place (from 1st October) the Council would have a better understanding of whether there was sufficient money in place. With regard to the ageing population there was expanding need. Officers were constantly in discussions with providers, who were banded in terms of standards. In relation to mental health provision there was a need to concentrate more on preventative work, however, there would still be a need for support to people with mental health needs.

Councillor N. Wright advised that in terms of increasing support and making people feel safe, more investment had been made in the telecare system in staff and equipment. There were evening and overnight services and there was greater engagement in the preventative agenda. She had a determination and passion to ensure the Council provided the best services it could.

The Leader added that putting people in homes perpetuated dependence and so the added bonus of the way the Council was providing services to enable people to stay in their own homes meant that they were being re-enabled to help themselves.

Councillor D. Wilson, Portfolio Holder for Safer City, proceeded to inform the Committee of the key responsibilities included in his portfolio:-

- anti social behaviour;
- public and environmental health;
- cultural strategies and initiatives;
- the Safer Sunderland Partnership.

Councillor Wilson advised the Committee of the Food Certificate Scheme that was to be introduced, the drink banning orders and closed orders being used to reduce anti social behaviour, partnership work being undertaken with the Football Club, of the raised profile of the Sunderland Empire Theatre in that acts were coming into Sunderland after being on the West End, of the work undertaken on the World Cup

bid and the Heritage Lottery bid in respect of Hylton Castle and the re-enactment planned for the Hylton Castle battle (photographs circulated). He pointed out that the future of heritage in Sunderland was being developed firstly with experts in respect of Bowes Railway, Maritime Heritage, the Marine Activities Centre and the Aircraft Museum. These were all ways to divert young people into positive activities.

Councillor Copeland commented that the two windows next to the City Library in Fawcett Street which were owned by the Council were letting the City down. She suggested that they should be cleaned, together with the adjacent pavement, the shutters lifted and attractive displays be set up.

Councillor T. Wright welcomed the Hylton Castle battle re-enactment and the information that this would see approximately 5,000 people coming into the City who would be using the City's pubs and spending money in the shops.

Councillor J. Scott acknowledged the role the Sunderland Empire Theatre was playing in bringing people into the City which he attributed to the standard of shows that were being staged there.

In response to Members' enquiries, Councillor Wilson advised that the Food Certificate Scheme would be voluntary. It would be in businesses' interests to have one.

Mr. Ron Odunaiya, Executive Director of City Services, added that the Government had been proposing to bring out such a scheme for a number of years. It would encourage the licensee to ensure there was quality provision as people would vote with their feet if any establishment did not have a certificate making it a very positive way to encourage quality standards.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes, Councillor Wilson commented that with regard to the Old Sunderland Townscape and the East End, the river was an asset that was not getting used. Sunnyside needed attractions to bring people down to that area of the City. He was looking at the possibility of a ferry to link up with St. Peter's and the beach. With regard to the Connexions windows on Fawcett Street, thought was being given to a programme to let local people use the window space to show displays for artists to showcase their work or develop a calendar of events to decorate the window, one such event could be the Chinese New Year for example.

Mr. Odunaiya added that he had tasked his team to look at opportunities for the above.

Councillor Wilson advised that the Hylton Castle business plan was due to be completed and would be available to look at in the near future.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Wilson for his briefing.

Councillor Blackburn, Portfolio Holder for Attractive and Inclusive City, was in attendance and proceeded to highlight key responsibilities for his portfolio including:-

- neighbourhood, environmental services and street scene, included in this was tackling flytipping;

- grounds maintenance and buildings maintenance;
- facilities management;
- highways maintenance;
- refuse collection.

Councillor Blackburn highlighted:-

- the refurbishment works to Barnes Park which had commenced in October 2009;
- the completion of the community 25m swimming pools at Hetton and Silksworth;
- the increased and improved play provision in the City through the Play Pathfinder Initiative; a project worth £4.1M which was on schedule for completion;
- the free swimming initiative for under 16's and over 60's;
- the renewed and refurbished libraries at Silksworth and Washington.

Councillor Blackburn advised of the following initiatives for 2010/11:-

- the Kerb It scheme new blue bin to replace the black box and the changes to collection vehicles;
- the refurbishment of Washington Leisure Centre and changing facilities;
- the Football Investment Strategy;
- the Northumbria Centre development;
- play parks maintenance;
- the development of the Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor;
- the capital provision for structural maintenance of highways resulting in the increased repudiation rate of claims made against the Council resulting in a reduction of public liability insurance premiums;
- the Library service review; and
- supporting the development of the new Houghton Primary Care Centre with a new wellness centre.

In response to Councillor Walker, Mr. Ron Odunaiya, Executive Director of City Services, advised that the Council was working with a number of community entities in relation to the Northumbria Centre. The playing surface was not safe and was closed. There was no proposal to sell the Centre but to work as a partner to ensure access was maintained and influence facilities development as it tied back to the wider Football Investment Strategy.

The Chairman thanked the staff for the work done on winter highway maintenance. He commented that the investment in highway maintenance had resulted in lower insurance premiums and therefore had paid for itself.

Councillor Copeland asked that provision be made to maintain paths in cemeteries.

Councillor D. Forbes commented that he would like to see the extension of the Metro to Fence Houses and Penshaw from South Hylton.

The Leader advised that he had impressed upon Lord Adonis the journey times from the North East and the position with regard to the regional infrastructure. He stated that the opening of the Leamside Line would be a waste of time for freight. He would, though, like to see the extension of the Metro to Fence Houses and Houghton.

Councillor J. Scott stated that he would like to see the old mineral line opened to extend to the Metro. He also commented that he would like to thank the Council for the opening of the new swimming pool at Hetton which was a fantastic facility.

Mr. Odunaiya stated in response to Councillor Copeland that there were pressures on the budget but issues around the maintenance of cemeteries would be considered.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Blackburn for his presentation.

Councillor Trueman, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities, proceeded to address the Committee. He briefed Members on the key aspects of his portfolio as follows:-

- Housing strategy;
- Housing renewal;
- Cohesive and inclusive communities;
- Carbon management;
- Strategic waste management; and
- Recycling – a new campaign called 'love food, hate waste'.

Councillor Trueman advised that the key areas for development with his portfolio were:-

- bringing more empty homes into use;
- the extension of the Warm Homes Initiative;
- the implementation of the Selective Licensing Scheme;
- the implementation of the North East Loans Partnership;

- the development of the Suitable Homes for Living Strategy;
- the Urban Renewal Programme.

Councillor Walker asked how many empty homes had been brought back into use.

Councillor Trueman advised that the Council had been very successful with approximately 160 homes coming back and the figure was increasing year on year.

Councillor Mordey commented that he and his fellow Ward Councillors, Councillors T. Martin and M. Smith appreciated the Selective Licensing Scheme.

Councillor Copeland asked how successful the Council had been in getting accredited landlords on board as some had said there was too much 'red tape'.

Councillor Trueman stated that there was a need to ask questions and there were rules and regulations to follow, however, the Council had been very successful and the Tyne and Wear Partnership saw Sunderland as leading the way. He added that there was a number of landlords that the Council would never 'get to grips with' and also some unaccredited landlords had withdrawn from the rental market.

Councillor M. Forbes enquired with regards to the Waste Management Strategy, whether there would be any direct benefit from the electricity generated to the Council, in the form of a share of the profits.

Councillor Trueman advised that the Council was currently in the position of evaluating two tenders which were proposing different solutions to Waste Management.

Mr. Odunaiya added that each proposal would have to demonstrate how they would use the waste facility and it would be for the Council to decide which option it preferred.

Mr. Keith Beardmore, Director of Financial Resources, advised that different bidders were bringing different solutions around heat and power and scope existed to sell in the marketplace.

Councillor M. Forbes asked for further information in relation to the 48 acquisitions of homes at Hetton Downs.

Mr. Neil Revely, Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services, advised that the acquisitions allowed the Council to demolish the homes and build new ones in the City. The Homes and Communities Agency was a partner in that delivery and also in relation to the scheme in Castletown.

Councillor Copeland referred to the waiting list in the City for social housing.

Councillor Trueman stated that a myth surrounded the size of the waiting list. He would need to check the current figures, however, the list included people who were not homeless but simply wanted to move house.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Trueman for his attendance.

Councillor Gofton, Portfolio Holder for Responsive Services and Customer Care was not able to attend as she was away on Council business.

The Leader of the Council therefore proceeded to brief Members in relation to the key responsibilities and achievements of the portfolio. Councillor P. Watson advised that:-

- a Head of Customer Services had been appointed;
- the Community Services restructure had been completed;
- a Customer Care Contact System had been developed;
- the Washington Customer Service Centre had opened;
- the Community Network Business Plan had been agreed;
- the Sunderland Compact was progressing.

New starts for the portfolio included:-

- a scheme to develop the Civic Centre reception for visitors; and
- a contribution towards the works in relation to the new Houghton Primary Care Centre.

The portfolio also covered development of the Sunderland Way of Working. Southwick Sports Hall had also been picked up under the Positive Futures Programme.

Mr. Odunaiya undertook to give consideration to a suggestion by Councillor Mordey that a cash machine be installed as part of the Civic Centre reception scheme.

Councillor Copeland thanked the Director for his work in connection with the Southwick Sports Hall which she hoped would have a happy ending.

Mr. Odunaiya advised that money had been allocated to the facility to allow it to stay open. An exit strategy needed to be developed, however, the Council had 12 months to look at alternative options.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for his contribution and invited Mr. Keith Beardmore, Director of Financial Resources, to provide Members with a summary of the budget and service reports and address comments and questions.

Mr. Beardmore paid testament to the hard work and support of others in preparing the budget for 2010, principally the Leader of the Council and Councillor Allan, the Deputy Leader and all the Cabinet Members for their co-operation. He thanked Chief Officer colleagues for researching the proposals and the due diligence of his own staff, namely Mr. George Blyth, Deputy Director of Financial Resources and Ms. Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Management, and recognised the contribution they had made.

Mr. Beardmore proceeded to provide a brief summary of the key points of the budget and service reports. He pointed out that the Government had reiterated that it expected the average Council Tax increase in England for 2010/2011 to fall to a 16 year low which would mean increases should be lower than the national increase

of 3% in 2009/2010. He highlighted the small surplus in the Collection Fund of £50,000 which would be taken into account when setting the Council Tax level for 2010/2011. Mr. Beardmore drew attention to Appendix B, Capital Programme 2010/2011 Environmental, Protective and Cultural (Other Services) new starts and Appendix C, Capital Programme 2010/2011 Children's Services, Adult Services, Highways and Housing proposed schemes, projects and areas for investment. He then referred Members to the Revenue Budget and proposed Council Tax for 2010/2011 which had taken the results of the consultation fully into account and was now recommending an increase of 1.2% in respect of the Council, providing an overall increase of 1.29% after adding the Northumbria Police and Fire and Rescue Authority precepts.

The Leader of the Council commented that everyone was aware of the economic outlook and the budget had been set with that in mind, but notwithstanding that, it was still a positive budget. He was aware that other Councils had had to take drastic action. Here in Sunderland the Council had not had to do this but had a plan to manage the situation and look ahead and not impose compulsory redundancies as long as they followed the Sunderland Way of Working. He thanked the people of Sunderland for helping the Council to do this and the Trades Unions who had supported the Council. He thanked the Heads of Service, the Director of Financial Resources and his staff, acknowledging their importance to the wellbeing of the City by providing measures to protect businesses and vulnerable people and keep the Council Tax rise to the lowest they could. There were measures to ameliorate the effects of Council Tax on the worst off. The budget returned the lowest Council Tax in the Tyne and Wear area and the region and was one every Member should be proud of.

Councillor M. Forbes enquired whether there were any implications with Inland Revenue of including all PFI on the balance sheet.

Mr. Beardmore advised that there was no impact on the balance sheet. The UK's position meant there was no impact on Council finances or on future borrowing requirements or restraints in relation to this.

Full discussion having taken place on the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Council be advised that the Scrutiny Committee noted that, notwithstanding the difficult economic outlook and the restrictions this presented, the Cabinet had still managed to bring forward a progressive proposed budget for 2010/2011, which would result in a low Council Tax. The Committee thanked the Cabinet, the Director of Financial Resources and his team and the Service Directorates for being able to formulate a budget to allow the Council to achieve its aims.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st March, 2010 to 30th June, 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 above period which relate to the Management Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sarah Abernethy, Trainee Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report and invited Members to consider the Forward Plan.

Councillor Mordey advised that at the Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17th February it had been noted that four entries on the latest copy of the Forward Plan had appeared that were to be considered at the next Cabinet meeting on 10th March and, as the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place after this date, Members had been disappointed to note that they would not have the opportunity of considering the reports prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

Councillor Mordey asked that the Committee's comments be passed to the relevant department(s).

In response to Councillor T. Wright's request for the Management Scrutiny Committee to receive the report to Cabinet on the governance arrangements at the Port of Sunderland, Councillor Mordey advised that the Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee would be receiving a report on this. It was suggested that all Members receive a copy of the report.

Councillor T. Wright drew attention to entry No. 01362 – 'To consider the implementation of further key improvement projects' and commented that the description was very vague and that it needed to be more specific in order that people would know what the entry on the Plan referred to.

Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Chief Solicitor, suggested that the time was right in view of the many organisational changes in the Council to re-issue the guidance to Officers on the Forward Plan to make them aware of what was required.

The Chairman commented that it was important that this was undertaken and Service Directorates were made aware of the need to include entries on the Forward Plan and also that the descriptions of the decisions to be taken were clear.

5. RESOLVED that the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st March, 2010 to 30th June, 2010 be received and noted and that the above actions be taken forward.

Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes for 2009/2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for information, the variations to the Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes for 2009/2010 and providing an opportunity review the Committee's own Work Programme for the remainder of this municipal year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sarah Abernethy, Trainee Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report.

6. RESOLVED that the variations to the Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes for 2009-10 and to the Scrutiny Committee's own Work Programme be noted.

(Signed) Councillor R.D. Tate,
Chairman.