

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on TUESDAY 11TH OCTOBER 2022 at 4.30 p.m.

Present: -

Councillor D. Snowdon in the Chair

Councillors Ali, Dixon, Foster, Reed, Scanlan, and H. Trueman.

Also in attendance: -

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

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

Ms Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration, Sunderland City Council

Members of the Press

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Edgeworth, Fagan, Laws, Mordey and Warne.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27th September 2022

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27th September, 2022 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, advised the committee that as Councillor Edgeworth could not be present, he had submitted via email a request that in relation to Page 7 (Ninth para) the minutes be amended to include 'BAME' as well as LGBTQ+

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27th September 2022 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the amendment above.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Low Carbon (Draft) Annual Report 2021/2022

Councillor Reed made an open declaration as a Member of the Shadow Carbon Reduction Board.

Low Carbon (Draft) Annual Report 2021/2022

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an overview of the context for the Council's low carbon activity and annual reporting, summarising the structure of the Draft Low Carbon Annual Report 2021/22, highlighting overall emissions data for the Council and City in 2021/22 and 2020 respectively, and noted publication by BEIS of a new dataset which it was proposed would form the basis of reporting in future years.

The report was supplemented with a presentation taking Elected Members through key detail included within the draft Annual Report document which was attached.

Following discussion with Committee Members, the draft Annual Report would be finalised prior to consideration by Cabinet in November 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration presented the report and was on hand to answer Members queries.

Councillor H. Trueman referred to our reliance on plantations/trees and open space but raised concern that Planning considerations were conflicting with our green agenda as Officers and Committee were not able to turn down applications within Greenbelt land when they had met certain criteria. Councillor H. Trueman referred to a proposed solar farm in Usworth, which would be a massive development and was necessary for the National Grid to connect into the system from this location.

Councillor H. Trueman commented that residents in this area would not see a reduction in their energy bills from this as the money would go to shareholders, however the residents would see their greenspace lost.

Councillor H. Trueman added that it would be politicians job to raise this agenda to be able to give the Planners more teeth in deciding these proposals and to look at brownfields sites so that they did not conflict with our green agenda.

Ms Auld advised that she would take away these comments and have discussions with Planning colleagues. Councillor H. Trueman suggested that conversations would be needed within Parliament also.

Councillor Reed referred to the data on Council Scope 3 Emissions and enquired as to what the situation would be if the data started to show working from home was less efficient than staff working in one office space and what the Council would do in such a situation and if there was a Policy on this.

Ms Auld commented that it was important to understand where the emissions were being spent and the implications of these costs. In relation to ways of working, the organisation had to take decisions based on the appropriate way to operate so they would continue to provide the data to make informed decisions and get that balance correct.

Councillor Reed referred to the Planning issues raised and commented that it was difficult to square that circle. Councillor Reed enquired as to the philosophy of the Council over existing buildings and if they would look to keep buildings rather than knocking down and rebuilding. Ms Auld advised that it would depend in each case, how fit for purpose each building was, how it could be retrofitted and the relative cost for that. Consideration would have to be taken on the environments of what the building was but there was also evidence that investments made into the City Centre have been followed by private sector investment so there was no single formula and it was a judgement and balance of regenerating the city, creating opportunities and also managing the environment.

In response to Councillor Reed's query over decision making on building houses and the processes involved, Ms Auld advised that all land was considered through the Local Plan and allocated as green space or employment for example, this gave structure for all decisions made. This was not binary and it was a balance with developments about how the land was to be used as Housing Developers could provide mitigations against some impacts therefore a balance/judgement had to be made.

Councillor Reed referred to the previous meeting and the intention of the Council to bring empty properties back in to use and filling the gaps of other housing providers and enquired if these homes would be decarbonised as they were brought back into use. Ms Auld advised that there were certainly conversations taking place with the Team to look at decarbonising as they were brought back into use.

In response to Councillor Reed's query over Highways measures best practice and if the council researched carbon production of these, Ms Auld advised that the Council monitored air quality around the City and intervened where this was high, she was not sure if this was done around speed humps or roundabouts but she could look into this for further detail.

Councillor Reed wished to wholeheartedly endorse the expansion of the school street scheme across the City and he would certainly push for these to be rolled out further.

Councillor Foster commented that the issue of Trees within the City was a problem with 2,500 houses to be built by Gentoo, it was a problem for residents, what type of trees were to be planted and there was a need to engage with Ward Members as it was usually them that received the backlash from residents. Councillor Foster added that he understood the need to plant trees but consideration was needed on the type and location of these rather than just planting for the sake of statistics.

Ms Auld advised that there was a Tree Task Group who were talking to tree specialists to ensure the correct type of tree were planted and the group looked at funding and numerous assessments. It was something they were aware of and they were trying to be joined up in what they were doing along with planning, management and maintenance of existing sites. Ms Auld acknowledged that it would be sensible to have conversations with Ward Members on proposed sites going forward.

Councillor Foster wished to highlight the Pallion Refuse Centre which he felt was excellent. Councillor Foster also raised the news that South Tyneside Council had

informed they would not be going ahead with their Mine Water Heating project as the bore hole had collapsed and whilst this was the pilot for the whole country, queried if this would affect the proposed Sunderland scheme.

Ms Auld advised that like any project, it would have to be carefully monitored and assessed by engineers at each stage but she would consider this further.

Councillor Ali referred to previous comments on planning and green belt developments and agreed with Councillor H. Trueman. Councillor Ali commented that national rules around Greenbelt were being manipulated by greedy firms, making their jobs as Councillors impossible and he felt that this was something for the City's MP's to take up in parliament so that these firms couldn't take advantage anymore.

Councillor Dixon suggested that Officers liaise with youth groups on possible projects over the safer streets scheme for pupils to participate in possible future artwork/information programmes which had worked well in the past. Councillor Dixon also enquired if there were any comparisons with other authorities progress in relation to Carbon reduction figures.

Ms Auld advised that they did this through the Carbon Disclosure Project and the Key Cities Network.

With regards to the School Streets Scheme, Councillor Dixon commented that he was keen to see the progress of the Washington pilot as St Michael's Ward was keen to partake also. Ms Auld advised that she would seek information on the pilot scheme.

Councillor Dixon referred to the issue of trees and that a great deal had been felled in Back House Park in the last week and that he agreed Ward Members should always be kept in the loop if possible and also advised that he had been referred to the Councils website which he felt it was important that more information could be passed out the better.

Councillor Dixon also referred to the green economy and queried if Brexit had helped in this regard or not. Ms Auld advised that it was very difficult to trace back what were the factors to specifically encourage or discourage investment as the country had gone through significant factors such as the pandemic, war in Ukraine for instance affecting the energy situation, which impacted upon investment decisions. We also still had some mechanisms that were still the same as when we had EU membership and was an ongoing transition so it was possibly too early to say.

Councillor Reed referred to the quarterly reporting on reducing emissions and enquired if there was a report on carbon capture also. Ms Auld advised that they were recording carbon capture from tree planting and they would quantify estimates from the planting of new trees, it was not in this current report but they would look to capture going forward and it was a useful challenge to take away on how they manage this data.

The Chairman referred to global energy prices and enquired if Officers foresee this having an impact on individuals usage, with residents having to use warm spaces therefore not using their own heating and electricity.

Ms Auld advised that she did not expect to see a huge difference but the challenge was there was a two year lag on the data. The estimation would be that the number/volume of people turning their heating down would have an impact on carbon reduction and they expected to see a reduction but this data would not come through for two years.

In response to the Chairman's query over grants available for insulation of homes, Ms Auld informed that they continued to monitor the schemes all the time to see what was available and what could be applied for as well as signposting to Energy Company schemes.

With regards to Councillor Reeds query over Newcastle's Clean Air zones and if this was something Sunderland was considering, Ms Auld commented that it was not something she was aware of us considering as traffic flows worked relatively well around Sunderland.

In response to Councillor Foster's query over who was leading on tree management issues, Ms Auld advised that the new Director of Environmental Services was in place now and his team would be leading on tree management.

Having discussed the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Committee considered and discussed the draft 2021/22 Low Carbon Annual Data report and its comments be noted.

Annual Work Programme 2021-22

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), to provide options, provide support and advise Members on the development of the scrutiny work programmes for 2022/2023

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Member's information

Councillor Dixon raised the point that the programme didn't have anything specifically relating to heritage. Mr Diamond suggested that something could be included with the Future High Street Fund report. The Chairman also suggested that it possibly could come under the Events Report. Mr Diamond to make further investigations and possibly ask Rebecca Ball to provide something in January.

Councillor Reed enquired if Graham Scanlon would be attending the meeting when the Housing Providers reported to Committee. Mr Diamond advised that he would pose the question.

3. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2022-2023 be noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator 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 14th September, 2022 (copies circulated).

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

Mr Diamond reminded Members to get in touch if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

4. 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. SNOWDON,
Chairman.