

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 11TH JANUARY, 2018 at 2.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor David Snowdon in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Curran, Dixon, G. Galbraith, I Galbraith, E. Gibson, Porthouse and Turner.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Ms Liz McEvoy, Team Leader Housing Strategy, Economy and Place

Mrs Christine Tilley, Governance Services Team Leader, Sunderland City Council

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Essl, Marshall and Taylor.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5th December, 2017

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5th December, 2017 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5th December, 2017 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Update on the Housing Strategy for Sunderland 2017 - 2022

The Executive Director of Economy and Place submitted a report (copy circulated) providing an update and seeking feedback from the Committee on the Housing Strategy for Sunderland 2017 - 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman welcomed Ms Liz McEvoy, Team Leader Housing Strategy, Economy and Place to the meeting and she proceeded to brief the Committee on the report highlighting that the draft Housing Strategy had gone out for consultation during May and June 2017 and there had been 158 respondents.

Ms McEvoy referred Members to the three partner working groups which had been established to oversee the delivery of each priority of the Housing Strategy and the monitoring arrangements detailed in the report.

Councillor Gibson queried whether the infrastructure needs were taken into consideration where a large number of houses were to be built as well as the NHS provision that would be required. Councillor Gibson commented that 750 executive homes were to be built on the Chapelgarth development and there was already an issue with the traffic and parking in that area.

Ms McEvoy advised that the infrastructure needed to support housing developments was taken into account during the planning process. She was aware there were concerns with regards to the Chapelgarth development in this respect from Members and residents already living in that location and comments in this vein had been received in response to Chapter One and the priority 'Maximising housing growth and increasing the choice of housing' in the Strategy.

In response to Councillor Turner, Ms McEvoy confirmed that there was an awareness of empty properties and that they were taken into account.

In response to Councillor Blackburn, Ms McEvoy advised that she would check to see if changes to Gentoo's allocations policy would impact on the Strategy. With regards to self-build homes, Ms McEvoy advised that the Council held a register of where these were taking place. There were 47 on the register at the present time but there was nothing to stop others in different parts of the city doing this also.

Ms McEvoy advised that she would get back to Councillors Blackburn and I. Galbraith regarding the number of new build houses in the Hetton and Barnes Wards. Ms McEvoy also advised that more bungalows through registered providers were coming through the planning process including affordable bungalows which were getting funding through the Homes and Communities Agency. She would confirm the number of bungalows being built and provide this information to Councillor Blackburn. She added that 42% of new house building was being carried out in the Coalfield area.

In response to Councillor Porthouse's enquiry concerning the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs), Ms McEvoy advised that they were used to take over the management of a property over a period of 5-7 years and the Council would receive the rental. However an easier route was the enforced sale of a property to recoup the costs associated but this relied on their being a debt on the property.

Ms McEvoy reported that the Council had not carried out any EDMOs, however it had completed its first enforced sale. Ms McEvoy explained that the Council used to employ 3 Empty Property Officers but there wasn't anyone doing the proactive work to identify empty homes at present. Efforts were being made however to bring back one post to carry out this work.

Councillor Curran commented that some self-build developments were atrocious and he would like to see this kind of development brought more under control.

Councillor Curran referred to the comments from respondents. In Chapter 1 he highlighted and welcomed the comment that they were strongly opposed to building

on the Green Belt and that he could understand why they did not support the building of executive housing as it was not within their reach. In relation to Chapter 2, Councillor Curran commented that it was his view that all Councillors would support the comment from respondents that 'in neighbourhoods in decline there should be early intervention, demolition, enforcement'.

Ms McEvoy stated that there was nothing in the above comment that she would disagree with, however it was a matter of having the resources to be able to carry out enforcement and she had flagged this up with the relevant sections in the Council.

Councillor I. Galbraith commented that many vulnerable people presenting themselves at Accident and Emergency were doing so because they were not registered with a GP and were living in hostels or were homeless.

Ms McEvoy agreed that it was difficult as they just presented themselves at Accident and Emergency even if they were registered, as often they were not good at making appointments.

Councillor I. Galbraith added that the cottage streets might be the answer in respect of housing for the elderly population if someone was to buy the houses up and make adaptations to them.

Ms McEvoy advised of plans to use Section 106 money to acquire and refurbish empty properties, bungalows and cottages, initially in Millfield.

In response to questions raised by Councillor Dixon, Ms McEvoy advised that the definition of Executive Housing was Council Tax Band G and above. Currently there were only 600 properties in Sunderland in this band. People wanted larger 4 bed homes which did sell as Council staff, who were monitoring them, could confirm. There had been a low number of respondents to the consultation however the Regional Providers Network had been asked to take part. There were only 4 people in the Housing Strategy Team who had used the tools available to them such as the internet and social media and had done what they could to get people involved. Non-traditional methods of construction were being piloted by a smaller builder on a site owned by the builder. Comments and objections had been raised to all 3 stopover sites for Gypsies and Travellers and colleagues were looking at them to come up with some recommendations.

Councillor G. Galbraith stated that on the whole she agreed with the Strategy but had concerns as to whether it would be brought into play as Council resources were low and she queried how much influence it would have.

In response Ms McEvoy advised that Gentoo had been involved in the development of the plans and had taken them on board. In terms of Priority 1 of the Strategy, this was already being exceeded. There was however more concern with Priority 2 and this would be monitored.

The Chairman expressed concern that the support around vulnerable people was not what it should be to assist them with getting their own tenancy in the private rented sector and making sure the housing was suitable. He commented that it was difficult for tenants to complain if the housing was not up to standard for fear of being evicted.

Ms McEvoy advised in relation to the above that a presentation was to be made to the Health and Well-being Board at the January meeting where issues such as the number of people being readmitted to hospital due to sub-standard accommodation would be raised for the Council and Health colleagues to work together on together to reduce.

In response to Councillor Dixon's enquiry about student accommodation, Ms McEvoy advised that the number of students living in Sunderland had reduced, whereas the number studying had gone up. There were more and more empty cottages in the Millfield area which the students had vacated which could be used for supported vulnerable housing. Ms McEvoy added that there were colleagues in the People Directorate to help people move on to appropriate housing in the privately rented sector, although resources had reduced in this area of the Council also.

Ms McEvoy thanked the Committee for their comments which she said would be taken on board.

The Chairman having thanked Ms McEvoy for her attendance, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and presentation, be received and noted and a further update on the Housing Strategy be provided to the Committee in a year's time.

Annual Work Programme 2017/18

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), setting out the current work programme of the Committee for the 2017-18 municipal year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

3. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme 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 12th December 2017 (copy circulated), was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

A copy of the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from 9th January was tabled at the meeting.

Councillor Porthouse requested further information in respect of item number 171024/217 regarding the establishment of a Sunderland Football Trust and associated issues, as set out on the Notice and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted and Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer make enquiries and circulate a response providing further information on the above item in the Notice to all Members of the Committee.

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

(Signed) D. SNOWDON,
Chairman.