

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY 8TH OCTOBER, 2019 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. Turner in the Chair

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

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

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

Ms Sharon Appleby, Head of Business Operation, Sunderland BID

Ms Mandy Brown, Business Owner

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Jenkins and Scullion.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10th September 2019

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10th September, 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 10th September, 2019 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Business Improvement District (BID) – Annual Update

The Head of Member Services and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) To provide the Committee with a progress report on the work of the Sunderland Business Improvement District (BID)

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Sharon Appleby, Head of Business Operation for Sunderland BID presented the report and was accompanied by Ms Mandy Brown, a local business owner to address any queries Members may have.

Ms Appleby advised that the BID's priorities were City Pride, City Promotion and City Voice. They were in the process of recruiting for a second street ranger due to the success from the current employee, who worked closely with the Council and Businesses as the eyes and ears on the street, tackling issues from cleansing to graffiti removal.

With regards to Policing, Safety, Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour, Sunderland compared no differently to any other area. Retail crime increased during Christmas time and they were working with The Bridges, The Council and the Police on implementing operations. The BID and the Bridges had paid towards these in order to send out a strong message to the public.

Ms Appleby advised that they were looking at Hoardings used during construction, similar to other areas.

In relation to City Promotion, a food and drink festival had been held in May with more than 10,000 people in attendance. Lots of lessons had been learned for different ways of working but it had been very successful and plans for a repeat event were expected for pay day weekend next year.

Ms Appleby also advised of the Lights Out Halloween festival taking place between 25th October to 3rd November and the Christmas Festival of Light with an additional 150,000 people expected. The Chinese New Year plans were being worked on for a bigger event based around the Museum, Winter gardens and Park.

Councillor Blackett referred to a recent interaction a Ward Resident had with the BID over social media with regards to someone defecating in the street and the BID's response had made the national press and queried if they regretted the statement that was put out.

Ms Appleby commented that it hadn't been a statement put out, but a Facebook comment, which had been a mistake. The BID tried to support and intervene in all sorts of ways and whilst with this particular issue it was not the right thing to do in hindsight, it did highlight the types of issues businesses were facing currently and she would be happy to meet with the ward resident if need be.

Ms Brown, Business Owner wished to comment that she had been happy with the BID taking a hard-line approach on such issues.

Councillor Foster commented that a lot of negativity was aimed at the BID yet he believed they were doing a great job and enquired if the operators of the proposed STACK in Seaburn would be those same operators of the Tipi at Keel Square. Ms Appleby confirmed that it would be the same operators and that there were no plans for a more permanent offer of the tipi as unfortunately this was just for Christmas.

Councillor Foster commented that he was glad to see the Festival of Light was to be at Mowbray Park and suggested that as the crowds could lead down to the Museum there needed to be more PA systems for them to be able to hear.

Ms Appleby advised that the fireworks and lights switch on would be at Keel Square then people would be directed to the park rather than all of it being within Mowbray Park.

Councillor Taylor commented that he had heard the BID had struggled to engage with Market traders and queried if they had considered pop up shops. Ms Appleby commented that they would love to have these and be more flexible with incentives as there were empty units but some of these were not in the greatest of conditions that required work to become habitable. The BID was working on discussions for an independent district to be able to address the pop-up shop issue.

In response to Councillor Taylors' suggestion of a Tapas trail to increase footfall into the city, Ms Appleby advised that she hadn't thought of this, but it was an idea to explore and with restaurant week seeking ideas in order to raise its game they would give this consideration.

Ms Appleby also advised in response to Councillor Taylors enquiry over discussions with public transport providers for the festival of light, that there had not been discussions over additional provision but more on the timings scheduled and she had a meeting with Nexus planned to consider the opportunities on how we could move people around the city on smaller buses. It may be that there was a need to invest an additional resource.

Councillor Taylor suggested that a greater offer of public transport needed to be provided for residents to get home. Ms Appleby advised that she would look into this.

Councillor Jackson informed of a recent Stagecoach meeting in which it was advised of the reduction of the number of E bus service from the North Side and suggested that the poorly advertised £2 evening ticket be more widely publicised and possibly moved back to 6pm. Ms Appleby agreed that how a service was advertised as a package did have an effect and there was a need for all partners involved to look at what and if any investment could be made for a marketing campaign.

Councillor M. Dixon wished to congratulate the BID for all the work done behind the scenes and queried if there had been any concerns raised in relation to the rents businesses had to pay.

Ms Appleby commented that the main issues raised tended to be about the amount of business rates they had to pay. Ms Brown advised that rents and rates were most problematic as business owners felt they were so high in relation to what they received. Ms Brown commented that owners did not wish to move to out of town locations as they wanted to see the city centre succeed but circumstances were very difficult, and they needed help from somewhere.

Ms Appleby advised that some landlords were not based in the City therefore it was more difficult to try and negotiate with those as opposed to the local owners who understood the area and could be easier to deal with.

Councillor M. Dixon referred to the closure of Frankie and Benny's and the Chinese restaurant in Sunnyside and enquired if there was a problem in the area. Ms Appleby commented that it had been a potential concern that the Cinema and bowling alley

were not in the ideal place when looking at a masterplan but currently they were all trading well. Frankie and Benny's were not just a Sunderland specific issue as they were in trouble all over the country.

Ms Appleby also advised that they had worked with Sunnyside businesses in relation to marketing but lots more thought needed to be had in how to do this better.

Councillor Fagan referred to the sale of tickets for the Festival of Light and suggested businesses be able to sell them in their stores for those impulse buyers who wish to buy on spec. Ms Appleby advised that tickets were sold by the Council so she wasn't certain but would liaise with Victoria French to see if businesses could sell tickets on the Council's behalf.

Councillor Blackburn proposed the idea of road trains around the city centre. Ms Appleby advised that she had not looked at this but was maybe something to consider when there were more people on the City. She would look at this with the Council's transport department and partners, but they were considering a smaller shuttle bus during the festival, but this did go against the "step up" campaign underway.

Councillor Blackburn also suggested that people be encouraged to park at Seaburn/South Hylton and utilise the metro. Ms Appleby advised that this wasn't in the plan but she could give consideration to this.

Councillor Foster enquired if there were any plans to extend the parking schemes such places as the Cinema and Frankie and Benny's offered where your parking could be validated. Ms Brown advised that she believed the schemes worked well but they were open to be abused.

Ms Appleby informed the Committee that Sunderland were going to participate in a pilot scheme as part of a Car Parking initiative that was originally proposed to the Dragons Den programme. The scheme involved perks where customers received discounted parking whenever they made a purchase from participating businesses within the City Centre.

The Chairman commented that at the recent heritage forum, the lack of signage was raised as an issue and queried if this was being addressed. Ms Appleby confirmed that there was due to be lots more of new modern signage and also new maps informing of distance and stops available before the events. They were also looking at more digital signage with a whole range of things coming together.

In relation to the Chairman's query over the use of volunteers around the City Centre similar to Durham, Ms Appleby advised that those volunteers used for the Tall Ships event had been asked to continue in their role for future events and as part of the Mackem's smile ambassadorial roles training was provided to help talk and inform people about the City. We did not have these roles full time as Durham does but when the time was right in terms of tourism and the number of people coming into the city this could be warranted.

Councillor Jackson referred to the numerous shows that the Sunderland Empire have hosted which have drawn crowds into the city and suggested that local restaurants utilise the exposure by advertising within the car parks.

Ms Appleby advised that the local restaurants would have to pay for this themselves and the restaurants surrounding the Empire Theatre tended to do well when a show was on but this didn't reach further into the city.

Councillor Jackson informed that Sunnyside car park still had old marketing paraphernalia for restaurants that had long since closed. Ms Appleby advised that she would have the Street Ranger take a look at this.

Councillor Taylor enquired if thought had been given to running a programme with the Council on tackling the excessive amounts of litter in the City and suggested the sticker on bins campaigns that had been utilised recently. Ms Appleby advised that there were stickers and such like on the majority of bins in the City Centre and better enforcement was being provided now, these campaigns would be refreshed before Christmas but they were continually looking for fresh, quirky ideas for better engagement.

In response to Councillor Blackburn informing of the Houghton Feast Parade in which there was a town crier to help guide people and give directions/photoshoots, Ms Appleby commented that this was a very good idea and provided a quirky service that wasn't just providing information.

Councillor Foster enquired if augmented reality technology had been considered to attract younger generations into the city. Ms Appleby advised that they did not have the smart city aspect yet as there wasn't free WiFi at present so youths were not that willing to use their own data allowances. They were giving consideration to infrastructure proposals with Businesses. Councillor Foster agreed to send Ms Appleby the details of trials carried out so far by the North Sunderland Area Committee.

In response to Councillor M, Dixon's request for the BID's opinion on how they would summarise their general relationship and progress made with local businesses, Ms Appleby advised that there was always room for improvement but they had worked hard with business over the last few years and she believed the relationship to be a strong one.

Ms Brown referred to the recent fire which occurred at Peacocks and advised that the BID had been there to support the owners of everyone affected and the relationship required the businesses to step up and work with BID to get best out of the arrangement, it was a two way street with room for improvement on both sides.

Having fully considered the report, the Chairman thanked Ms Appleby and Ms Brown for their attendance.

2. RESOLVED that the Committee considered the progress made by Sunderland BID and noted the report.

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 presented the report for Members information.

2. 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 16th September, 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.

Councillor Blackburn sought further information in respect of the following items

170927/212 ('To approve in principle the establishment of a new police led Road Safety Partnership) embracing the Northumbria Force Area')

190905/400 ('To agree to procure a dynamic partner to support the development of a sustainable, affordable credit solution for council staff and city residents')

190521/358 ('To approve and make a capital contribution to Phase 4 of the Bridges comprising the redevelopment of the former Crowtree Ice Rink building to provide a new leisure use')

Mr Diamond having stated that he would follow up with the appropriate officers dealing with these items, it was:-

3. 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.

Note:-

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.