

**At a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE  
SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 14<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 2016 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor N. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Davison, D. Dickson, Fletcher, Scanlan, David Snowdon and Dianne Snowdon.

Also in attendance:-

Councillor Elliott – (observing)

Mr Gavin Barker, Senior Manager, Mazars LLP

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Les Clark, Chief Operating Officer – Place, Sunderland City Council

Ms Karen Davison, Deputy Head of Financial Resources, Sunderland City Council

Ms Margaret Douglas, Complaint & Feedback Team Manager, Sunderland City Council

Ms Gillian Gibson, Consultant in Public Health, Sunderland City Council

Mr Dan Hattle, Planning Implementation Manager, Sunderland City Council

Ms Rhiannon Hood, Assistant Head of Law and Governance, Sunderland City Council

Ms Marie Johnson, Complaints Manager, Adult Services, Sunderland City Council

Ms Linzi Milley, Senior Planner, Sunderland City Council

Mr David Noon, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr David Tate, Healthwatch

Ms Karen Taylor, Complaints Manager, Children's Services, Sunderland City Council

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Howe and also from Mrs Blakey and Ms Elliott.

**Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the reference on page 5 to 'the Working Group in respect of Breast Services' being amended to read 'the Working Group in respect of Safeguarding.'

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **Annual Audit Letter**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report attaching a copy of the report considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2015 (copies circulated) which provided details of the Sunderland City Council Annual Audit Letter covering the year 2014/2015.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Mr. Gavin Barker, Senior Manager, Mazars LLP who proceeded to address the Committee in respect of his audit of Sunderland City Council for 2014/15. He advised that the auditor had issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements and a qualified value for money conclusion.

He highlighted that that the Council:

- Produced “good quality” accounts for 2014/15, within the statutory timescales and that gave a true and fair view of the council’s financial position;
- Produced an accurate Annual Governance Statement which was found to be consistent with the views of the auditor;
- Received no questions or objections to the accounts;
- Accurately reported its financial performance to government via the Whole of Government Accounts process.

With regard to the qualified audit opinion on the Council’s Value For money conclusion, Mr Barker advised that in all significant respects, the council had proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness of its use of resources, “except for” the areas that were assessed as inadequate by Ofsted in their report on children’s services published in July 2015.

The Chairman having thanked Mr Barker for his report and presentation it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Reference from Cabinet 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2016 – Revenue Budget 2016/2017 Proposals and Provisional Revenue Support Settlement 2016/2017**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated), setting out for the advice and consideration of the Committee a report considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2016, on the provisional budget proposals and Revenue Support Settlement, as the basis for consultation, prior to the receipt of the final Local Government Finance Settlement. Members’ views were requested in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

Ms. Karen Davison, Deputy Head of Financial Resources presented the report and drew member's attention to Appendices A, B & C which detailed:-

- i) The proposed Revenue Budget 2016/17 and Provisional Revenue Support Settlement 2016/17
- ii) The Council Tax Base 2016/2017
- iii) The Business Rates Income Forecast 2016/2017 and Projected Business Rates Outturn 2015/2016

The results of the spending pressures and commitments taken against the reduction in funding were illustrated in the funding gap as detailed in paragraph 7 of the report and paragraph 8 outlined the current proposals to meet this funding gap.

Members were informed that the Provisional Local Government Settlement included indicative funding levels for each year to 2019/20. These figures however took no account of the proposed Business Rates Review and therefore should be treated with extreme caution until the Government announced further details.

Ms Davison together with Mr Les Clark, Chief Operating Officer – Place, proceeded to ask address comments and questions from members in relation to :-

- i) The proposed rationalisation of the school crossing patrol service
- ii) The open parks policy and the proposal to allow community groups to become key holders if they so wished
- iii) The operation of the Area Based Budget Consultation Exercises and potential mechanisms for future consultations
- iv) The likelihood of a negative public reaction to some of the proposals
- v) The importance of improvements to information systems in identifying priorities and ensuring intervention is best targeted

The Chairman, having thanked Ms Davison for her report stated that the financial situation now facing Local Authorities was dire. She placed on record her thanks for all the work undertaken by members and officers and in particular that of the Finance Team in preparing the budget proposals. Accordingly it was:-

3. RESOLVED that it be reported to Council that:-

- i) the Scrutiny Committee resolved that it was satisfied with the information provided on the Revenue Budget Proposals and Revenue Support Settlement; and
- ii) the Committee recognised the difficult financial situation that the Council was facing and wished to acknowledge the work of Members and Officers and in particular that of the Finance Team in preparing the provisional budget proposals.

**Reference from Cabinet – 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2016 – Capital Programme – Third Capital Review 2015/2016, Provisional Resources 2016/2017 and Treasury Management Review 2015/2016**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) setting out for the advice and consideration of the Committee an extract from the report of the Capital Programme Third Review 2015/2016 including Provisional Resources available for 2016/2017 and Treasury Management Review 2015/16 which detailed two additions to the capital programme, which the Cabinet had referred to Council for approval.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Karen Davison Deputy Head of Financial Resources referred the Committee to Appendix A of the report which provided details of the schemes, namely provision for Vaux Phase 1 and Sunderland City Centre Cycle Permeability Scheme.

Ms Davison advised that the report was referred to the Scrutiny Committee, for advice and consideration in the context of the inclusion of the two additional schemes for 2015/2016 which were over the £250,000 threshold.

Consideration having been given to the Capital Budget scheme variations, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the Council be advised that the Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the Capital Budget scheme variations and had no additional comment to make.

**Reference from Cabinet – 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016 – South Sunderland Growth Area Draft Supplementary Planning Document and the South Sunderland Growth Area Infrastructure Delivery Plan**

The Head of Law and Governance, submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Scrutiny Committee with a copy of a report considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2016 in respect of the above matter.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were informed that the Cabinet had agreed to:-

- a) Approve the SSGA Draft SPD and supporting documents (including Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment) and the SSGA Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the purposes of public consultation and as material considerations in assessing planning applications, pending their finalisation and the adoption of the SPD.
- b) Authorise the Executive Director of Commercial Development to make any required minor amendments to the attached SSGA Draft SPD (including the Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulations Assessment and the SSGA Infrastructure Delivery Plan as necessary prior to their publication for public consultation.

To complement the report, Mr Dan Hattle, Planning Implementation Manager and Ms Linzi Milley, Senior Planner, provided members with a comprehensive powerpoint presentation which highlighted :-

- i) The vision and objectives of the SSGA
- ii) What the SSGA would include and how it would look
- iii) The infrastructure delivery plan and the time scales involved.

Mr Hattle and Ms Milley proceeded to address comments and questions from Members in relation to:-

- i) The likely provision (or otherwise) of associated infrastructure, such as GP surgeries, schools, emergency services and public transport etc
- ii) The impact of the proposals on the current road network
- iii) The extent of the consultation process and the engagement with residents' groups such as 'Keep Burdon Green'
- iv) The importance of the proposed housing offer in improving the economic prosperity of the city.

The Chairman having thanked Mr Hattle and Ms Milley for their report and presentation, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that:-

- i) The Scrutiny Committee recognised the importance of ensuring that the City's future housing needs were met and were satisfied with the commencement of the public consultation process providing that comments made around the previous public consultation exercise are taken into account; and
- ii) the Scrutiny Committee is provided with regular updates on the consultation process and development of the SSGA Plan with particular reference to infrastructure provision."

## **Complaints and Feedback Annual Report**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced Margaret Douglas, Complaints and Feedback Team Manager who presented the key aspects arising from the Complaints and Feedback Annual Report.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The joint report presented an overview across the range of complaints and feedback received by the Council in relation to its three complaints processes (Health & Social Care, Corporate and Children's Services). Marie Johnston and Karen Taylor were present to assist with any technical questions from members in relation to Adult Services and Children Services respectively. Ms Douglas was pleased to advise Member's that the Council had maintained its unblemished record with regard to Ombudsman complaints which had lasted for over a decade, the only Local Authority in the North East to have done so.

The Complaints and Feedback Team had now completed the migration of their complaints management system onto Microsoft dynamics which would make the reporting of complaints information easier and make the presentation of the data more meaningful for Members in future reports.

Consideration was given to the report with Members suggesting that it would be helpful for them in spotting trends if an interim report was made available between each annual report.

The Chairman having thanked Ms Douglas and her team for the report it was:-

5. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted, and
- ii) the Complaints and Feedback Team in conjunction with the Scrutiny Team develop an approach to provide the Committee with an interim report between each annual report of the Complaints and Feedback Team.

### **Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) presented by Margaret Douglas, Complaints and Feedback Team Manager on the key aspects arising from the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2014/15 following its submission to Cabinet at its meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from the 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2015 and the 28 day period from 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016 (copy tabled).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman asked that Members having any issues to raise or requiring further detail on any of the items included in the notice, contact Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, for initial assistance.

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

### **Annual Work Programme 2015/16**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the work programme for the Committee's work being undertaken during the 2015/16 council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted.

### **Lead Scrutiny Member Update**

The Lead Scrutiny Members submitted a joint report (copy circulated) providing an update to the Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of each of the six Lead Scrutiny Members and supporting Panels.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The members having received a position statement in respect of the procurement process for the Sunderland Integrated Substance Misuse Treatment and Harm Reduction Service it was:-

9. RESOLVED that

- i) the update of the Lead Scrutiny Members be received and noted; and
- ii) the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee be fully apprised by representatives of both the Council's Public Health Team and its Legal Services Team on the current situation in relation to the Integrated Substance Misuse Treatment and Harm Reduction Service.

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

(Signed) N. WRIGHT,  
Chairman.