

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 14th March, 2019
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present:- Councillor Gary White – Chair

Councillors:

S. Burgess

A. Gardner

H. Maxfield

M. Olszewski

B. Panter

M. Reddish

J Tagg

J Williams

Officers

Andrew Bird - Head of Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services,
Jayne Briscoe - Democratic Services Officer, Elaine
Burgess - Markets and Regeneration Officer, Regeneration
and Economic Development Manager - Kim Graham, Jo
Halliday - Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets, Chief
Executive - Martin Hamilton and Head of Operations -
Roger Tait

Also in
Attendance

The Leader of the Council – Councillor S Tagg
Deputy Leader of the Council – Councillor S Sweeney

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Harrison (who was represented by Councillor Maxfield) and Councillor Johnson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING - 13 DECEMBER 2018

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2018 be agreed as a correct record.

4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT YEAR 1 ACTION PLAN (NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE)

The Economic Development Strategy 2019-2023 was approved by Cabinet in March 2018 and work on Year 1 of the Action Plan is ongoing. The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager referenced this Strategy, which would be refreshed in accordance with the new Council Plan adopted in the autumn of 2018, whilst the focus was specifically on the Newcastle Town Centre element for this meeting.

To highlight the benefit that cultural and recreational events can bestow members viewed a short film compilation of The Homecoming.

Members directed officers to work with the BID on measures to improve and sustain footfall and reduce town centre vacancy rates, currently running at 17 per cent, and to develop a unique identity to encourage visitors to the Town Centre.

Officers acknowledged the challenging position with regard to the development of the Ryecroft area and in this respect the Borough was working with partners to secure external funding.

It was suggested that displays from the Borough Museum could be relocated to the Guildhall to enhance visitor experience to the Town Centre.

Whilst the Chair acknowledged the economic positives discussed by officers to demonstrate progress he asked that economic measures be developed and benchmarked to compare progress against other successful town centre locations to demonstrate progress. From an empirical perspective, the Chair also suggested that Cabinet Members go out and visit successful locations.

Agreed: (i) That Cabinet be recommended to develop and undertake a benchmarking exercise with successful town centre locations and to undertake a fact finding mission, visiting successful areas.

(ii) That Cabinet consider conversion of council owned town centre properties to residential accommodation.

(iii) That Cabinet be requested to enable suitable Borough Museum displays to be relocated to the Guild Hall to help inform and enhance the experience of visitors.

5. TOWN CENTRE MARKET

In line with a decision of Cabinet (7 November 2018) to undertake a review of the Town Centre Market the Markets and Regeneration Officer presented to members on two key elements of the consultation process – consultation with the general public and consultation with market traders.

The Chief Executive reinforced the view that adequate staffing resource was essential to meet the challenge within the retail section, reflected in the microcosm of the market trader. Curating space could not be left to happenstance to provide an attractive offer of local quality products.

Key suggestions included – stalls to be relocated and grouped by the Guild Hall, artisan and specialised stalls incentivised together with contactless payment and events encouraged.

The Chair encouraged swift action on the proposals, including the introduction of nipper, disabled and family friendly parking as soon as possible.

Agreed: (i) That the recommendations in the report be supported; specifically that the stalls be grouped around the Guildhall; electricity to be installed for use by stallholders; the introduction of nipper parking, incentivise prospective

artisan stallholders, examine incentives to encourage stallholders to offer contactless technology.

(ii) That Cabinet be asked to ensure a sufficiency of resources to expedite the proposals.

6. CONSIDERATION OF CAR PARKING ISSUES

The Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets submitted a report which reviewed the changes made to the car parking charges implemented prior to the Christmas retail period and considered the views of the Newcastle Business Improvement District (BID) Retailers Forum.

Prior to Christmas 2018 Cabinet introduced concessions of £1 after 3pm in addition to free parking for certain events such as the Christmas Light switch on. Although this had resulted in an increase in the number of car parking sales members suggested that advertising could be improved and increased with posters, banners and social media adverts. Members pressed for the introduction of technology such as car parking apps and contactless payment and for the condition of certain car parks to be improved. In relation to improvements at the Midway, monies had been allocated in the 2019-20 Capital Programme.

Members considered questions from Mr T Miles in relation to free parking after 1pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday together with the written response.

Agreed: That the proposals outlined in the report be accepted and the BID be requested to evidence the benefits of changes to parking charges in relation to footfall within the Town Centre.

7. REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets submitted draft amendments to the allocations policy, for scrutiny by the Committee.

Members of the Committee, whilst noting the proposed changes wished to scrutinise the changes in greater detail, particularly in relation to homelessness.

Agreed: That consideration of this report be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee.

8. RECYCLING AND WASTE SERVICE

The Head of Recycling and Fleet Services submitted a report which updated members on:-

- Progress on the development for the introduction of the new recycling collection service.
- Capital requirement for the new recycling collection service.
- The number of times comingled collections have taken place over the last quarter.
- Briefing on how the department coped with the recent bad weather and the resultant lessons learned and contingency plans taken forward.

- Briefing on governments recently announced consultation for their Resource and Waste Strategy
- Quarter 3 Performance – for information.

Without moving collections dates the service aimed to optimise rounds to collect the maximum amount of materials in the fewest rounds with the fewest vehicles.

The new green waste service had attracted 32% of households with a garden.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

9. PROGRESS REPORT ON TREE MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

The Head of Operations updated members on progress with the Councils tree work programme.

The provision of an additional £30,000 of funding was welcomed and members looked forward to an improvement in the service once the backlog had been addressed.

Agreed: That the report be noted and the Committee receive a further update report following review of the contract in February 2020.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

Agreed: That the report be noted.

11. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mrs Salwa El-Raheb Booth submitted 2 public questions in relation to the Ryecroft site and empty outlets. .

Members discussed the issues raised and asked:-

- If the car park adjacent to the Ryecroft could be improved. The Leader responded that monies were included in the Growth Fund Deal for works to this area.
- The Deputy Leader indicated that the Borough was looking to conclude negotiations with an anchor tenant in Lancaster Buildings.
- In response to a member suggestion the Deputy Leader indicated that the Council would examine the potential for conversion of its own commercial buildings to provide living accommodation.

Agreed: That developments and contractual obligations in relation to the Ryecroft be kept under review and reported to this Committee.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 20 JUNE 2019**

COUNCILLOR GARY WHITE
Chair

Meeting concluded at 10.00 pm