

## PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 February 2014

**PRESENT** – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Cossins, Grundy, Harman and L. Hughes (6)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors L Hughes, Lawton, EA Richmond and Wright. ()

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor ()

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning, Sharon Raine, Head of Organisational Planning, Peter Roberts, Consultant – Sustainable Community Strategy and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

**P41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**P42. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY** – The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) together with Darlington's Sustainable Community Strategy (also previously circulated), One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, which it was proposed to revisit and refresh in light of the changed circumstances since its approval in 2008. A PowerPoint presentation accompanied the report.

The submitted report outlined the background to the approval of Darlington's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS); the need, as a result of the Council's current financial position and the significant changes to the national economic situation to review the vision and the outcomes to ensure the Council and its partners continued to be focussed on key outcomes; and the processes involved in developing and approving a revised Strategy.

The Head of Organisational Planning reported that the Local Strategic Partnership had re-visited the original vision One Darlington; Perfectly Placed and that the Council had, as a result of the Money Talks Events and the Peer Review, developed a 'Vision on a Page' (also previously circulated) which showed the overall role of the Council in driving forward the vision for Darlington. It was reported that the vision, if approved by Cabinet and Council, had been developed in a way that enabled all partners to focus on the same vision, outcomes and conditions, whilst developing a statement about their own roles and the steps they would need to take within their own organisations.

It was proposed that the detailed delivery of the overall vision would be developed through further exploration with Members, partners and staff prior to the development of a further document which would fully articulate the vision and that further work thereon would be undertaken with all of this Council's Scrutiny Committees to develop appropriate delivery mechanisms to enable the SCS to be updated.

Members were invited to contribute to the revised SCS document and to consider how this Scrutiny Committee can contribute to the objectives to reduce inequality by ensuring Darlington has more businesses and more jobs, more people caring for our environment and that Darlington is a place designed to thrive.

Particular reference was also made to the need to measure performance against the key objectives and priorities and how this would be achieved and it was reported that a revised performance development framework process was currently being developed and would be reported to Members in due course. It was anticipated that this new framework would assist Members in developing their work programmes over the next Municipal Year and would focus Members on ensuring any work undertaken would reflect the strategic aims of the Council.

Scrutiny then concentrated on the objectives within its remit and discussion ensued on women being essential to the economy as they lived and worked longer, especially as many men were in physically demanding jobs and were unable to continue working; Darlington had to attract both high skilled and low earners to keep the economy thriving and in order to achieve that vision it was important to measure what was wanted to get the best for Darlington.

Members were reminded that money had to be spent where it would have key effect and better resources as the Council could not afford everything although partners could help to achieve some outcomes. It was stressed that some indicators were key to doing things differently and achieving outcomes with the help of the voluntary and community sectors.

The Consultant for the Community Strategy stated that the new SCS needed to be leaner and the articulation of the eight outcomes was key, consultation had begun with Officers and comments were welcomed by e-mail. Scrutiny was advised that this was the first of several focussed sessions and feedback was required as it was envisaged that the re-drafted SCS would be submitted to the meeting of this Committee scheduled for 9 April 2014.

It was stated that this Scrutiny had to focus on the three Place outcomes and it was important to map how interventions in one outcome could contribute to others. The Council had several strategies in place i.e. Housing, Economic and Local Plan which could be used to see if the SCS was capturing what it wanted to in those strategies. A conscious effort had been made to keep economic regeneration as this could help to grow the economy. Members were keen to change public opinion and advise that there was a direct link between Council tax paid and what was provided and if public wanted to maintain some services they had to consider volunteer groups or organisations.

Scrutiny were keen to encourage private industry to pay a fair wage to employees and possibly consider an incremental pay scheme for long service employees, it was suggested that this was something the Partnership could investigate. Members agreed it was essential to explain to a wider audience why Darlington was best for businesses.

Concerns were expressed that 3,400 children and 11,000 adults were living on less than £13k per annum and that 60 per cent of those adults were working, equality was an essential component of the SCS as it impacted on people.

Members agreed that fundamental to One Darlington: Perfectly Placed was the skills levels of people and the delivery of efficient outcomes. It was agreed that the new NHS Lifestyle Intervention Service based at the Dolphin Centre worked well and that as the

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SCS had many intervening issues a large diversity of employment opportunities were essential to the economy of Darlington.

Discussion ensued on the need for Darlington to sustain what it already had as well as encouraging other businesses and Gross Value Added (GVA) over all skill levels being essential for Darlington's economy. Any employment opportunities also had to have a wide range of housing opportunities for prospective employees. Members were also keen to assess the impact of the 'bedroom tax' on the number of private housing sector tenancies.

In respect of more people caring for our environment, Scrutiny reasoned that the officers currently employed in Street Scene would want to retain control of the service and that in order to understand how the service was delivered Committee would need to know more about Street Scene rosters, hours worked, number of staff and relevant contracts. Once this information was available Committee could assess if the service could be delivered in a different way. However, Members accepted that this was a detailed sensitive matter which affected people's lives

With regard to the global environment Members accepted that although car use was essential to attract people to the Town a sustainable transport system had to be provided.

Committee then gave consideration to the objective, Darlington a place designed to thrive, and were pleased to note that planning and design were key to the Local Plan (LP). The LP was a strong strategy that protected what Darlington had and encouraged new business to the Town. Committee were reminded that the cross town route had provided land for business use and that a place designed to thrive also included the culture of the town. Use of parks and open spaces was to be encouraged, and needed to be accessible for all, as this had an impact on health issues for residents.

In relation to culture, Scrutiny emphasised that the town's industrial heritage was important and that Darlington's unique selling point (USP) was the Darlington to Stockton Railway. Members were assured that although the new economic regeneration structure encompassed a tourism aspect there is no dedicated Tourism Officer. A suggestion was made that hotels and bed and breakfast establishments could promote Darlington in order to sell beds which in turn would aid the economy.

Following a question relating to the Vision on a Page the Head of Organisation Planning explained that the three middle boxes were for all Partners to achieve and that the top and bottom boxes were the details of why the partner was part of the Vision and how it would develop and achieve the Vision from its point of view.

Members suggested that businesses and the private sector could also be approached for their views on the draft Strategy.

Committee were reminded that there were many challenges ahead and it was the Council's duty to advise the public of the outcomes as a result of continued austerity measures, if the public sector continued to reduce the role of local authorities will inevitably change. Members were advised that the projections discussed today were up until 2020 although after 2015 there may not be as much money but it could be apportioned fairer.

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**RESOLVED** – (a) That the Officers be thanked for their informative presentation.

(b) That the views of this Scrutiny Committee be considered when formulating the draft Sustainable Community Strategy.

(c) That the re-drafted Sustainable Community Strategy be considered by this Scrutiny Committee at its next ordinary meeting scheduled for 9 April 2014.

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