

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 11th NOVEMBER, 2013 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair.

Councillors Bonallie, Howe, Kay, T. Martin, Shattock and N. Wright.

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Waller.

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 10th October, 2013

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10th October, 2013 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Change in the Order of Business

At this juncture the Chairman advised that the remaining items of business on the agenda would be taken in the following order:- item 5, item 6, item 4, item 10, item 7, item 8 and item 9.

Sunderland Healthwatch

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with background information on the role of Sunderland Health Watch and which introduced the recently appointed Chair of the organisation, Kevin Morris and Alesha Aljeffri, Healthwatch Sunderland Manager, who were present to provide the Committee with a presentation on how Healthwatch would operate in Sunderland.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes)

Ms. Aljeffri informed members that Healthwatch was an independent body, accountable to its membership of local people with a Governance Board made up of its members. Nationally Healthwatch England provided central leadership and support to Local Healthwatches and linked directly into the Care Quality Commission.

PCP (a leading regional health and wellbeing charity) had been commissioned to set up and run Healthwatch in Sunderland, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland.

Ms. Aljeffri explained that Healthwatch in Sunderland had the following vision:-

- influencing health and social care delivery
- a strong, independent, trusted and effective voice and a champion for local people
- supporting people to access health and social care services
- striving to ensure the best possible quality and choice in health, social care and wellbeing services for the benefit of all living and working in the city

and would have the following role:-

- Gathering views of local patients, public, service users and carers and making those views known to those who commission and provide local health and social care services
- Supporting the involvement / scrutiny by local people in the commissioning and provision of local health and social care services
- Providing information and signposting about health and care services to support local people to make informed choices
- Signposting them if they wish to complain, or get support to complain about these services. However it was not the role of Healthwatch to investigate individual complaints or advocate on behalf of individuals.

With regard to its powers, Ms. Aljeffri advised that service providers had a duty to respond to Local Healthwatch reports and recommendations within 20 working days. (This now included providers of children's social care services). It had the power to enter and view premises where health or social care services were provided (except premises that provided social care to children). In addition Local Healthwatch had a statutory entitlement to a seat on the local Health and well-being Board and could escalate issues direct to Healthwatch England and through them, to the Care Quality Commission.

Ms. Aljeffri having explained the Healthwatch governance structure and progress made to date, concluded her presentation by outlining how members could get involved in the work being undertaken by Healthwatch in Sunderland.

The Chairman thanked Ms Aljeffri for her presentation and asked Mr. Morris what would be his priorities now he had been appointed Chair of Healthwatch? Mr Morris replied that he needed to understand what was going on, what other people were doing and what were the areas of good practice. This information needed to be captured and shared. He wanted to gain an overall view of how people engaged but more importantly he wanted to know what was the impact of the views expressed and how had services changed as a result.

Councillor N. Wright highlighted the importance of partnership working, she stated that the presentation made reference to utilising local networks and asked if Ms. Aljeffri could provide any examples. Ms. Aljeffri replied that VCAS were helping Healthwatch to engage at the local level and Groundworks were assisting in providing links to services for young people. Healthwatch were also engaging with the Children's Trusts, Sunderland's five Area Committees and would be visiting

People First on Monday. Ms. Aljeffri also asked the Committee to get in touch with any suggestions they may have regarding further links that could be made. In this regard Alan Caddick, the Council's Head of Housing Support and Community Living advised that he was involved with the Sunderland Armed Forces Network which met every two months with a view to improving support for veterans. The Network included representatives from the Royal British Legion, SSAFA etc and could provide excellent links for Healthwatch with regard to the health of local ex forces personnel. Councillor T. Martin added that the Fellowship of Services and Durham Light Infantry Association could also provide useful links in this matter.

Councillor Howe confirmed that the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel had already established close links with Healthwatch.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Martin, Ms Aljeffri confirmed that she had contacted the previous Links Groups and that there had been quite a successful transfer. Councillor Martin further asked whether Healthwatch were involved with the appeals process in relation to Section 2 Mental Health Act referrals. Ms. Aljeffri advised that Healthwatch did not deal directly with this process but were currently contacting the Trusts that did.

Councillor Shattock highlighted that there were many people and groups that had become, or were in danger of becoming disconnected from wider society and that they must not be forgotten. Mr Morris agreed and advised that Healthwatch would strive to tap into the seldom heard voices and reach out to those groups that were difficult to engage with. Councillor Shattock referred to Sunderland's Health and Well-being Board. She advised that the Board were a group of powerful people and that to be heard, a strong voice was required. She believed however that Mr. Morris and Ms. Aljeffri would provide that voice.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mr. Morris and Ms. Aljeffri for their attendance and looked forward to working with Healthwatch in the future. Mr. Morris replied that he liked to think that Healthwatch would operate as the Committee's critical friend.

2. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Commissioning Integrated Wellness Services

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with an overview of a programme of reform work related to the commissioning of integrated wellness, an outline of the concept and approach taken and which sought the Committee's views on how they would like to continue to be briefed on progress during the consultation and implementation process.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

To compliment the report, Gillian Gibson, Consultant in Public Health provided members with a presentation which described the background to the development of the integrated wellness services, fed back community views expressed during previous engagement work and identified the next steps in the process. The Chairman referred to the transfer of the Public Health function from the NHS to the Local Authority. He asked if the service was flexible enough to operate in a

peripatetic manner to access those hard to reach groups, and if this was the case, how would it be carried out. Ms. Gibson replied that the Health Champions would be utilised in these areas in order to assist people and sign post them to the most appropriate source of help or treatment. Health Trainers would also be working in those areas where they were needed the most.

Mr. Morris added that he was very pleased to hear that as part of the procurement of services there would be a review stage where service users would be asked “we thought you said.....is that correct?” He believed that this stage should also be used to double check the list of consultees to make sure no one was missing.

Councillor N. Wright referred to the reference made in Ms. Gibson’s presentation that there were some things that hadn’t worked and which would therefore be decommissioned. She asked what these services were, as presumably at one time they had been deemed to be important. Ms. Gibson replied that at this stage she would be reluctant to specify. It was well known that there was a requirement to make savings and the Authority was unable to commission on the same basis as it had before. Councillor Wright appreciated Ms. Gibson’s reluctance but asked that once the work had been completed the rationale for the decisions made was brought back before the Committee so it could ask questions regarding the approach taken.

There being no further questions for Ms. Gibson, the Chairman thanked her for her presentation. He moved that the item be referred to the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel as part of the consultation process, to further considered the matter and report back to the Committee in due course.

Accordingly it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report and presentation be received and noted; and
- ii) the item be referred to the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel as part of the consultation process to further considered the matter and report back to the Committee in due course.

Annual Audit Letter 2012/2013

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report attaching a copy of the report considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 6th November, 2013 (copies circulated) providing details of the Sunderland City Council Annual Audit Letter covering the year 2012/2013.

(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 2012/13. He advised that the auditor had issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements and an unqualified value for money conclusion.

He highlighted that that the Council:

- Produced accounts for 2012/13 that gave a true and fair view of the council's financial position and that no objections to the accounts were received
- Accurately reported its financial performance to government via the Whole of Government Accounts process
- Had proper arrangements in place to secure value for money.
- Was financially resilient and had managed its financial position very well as both budget setting and close budget monitoring were considered robust which had culminated in an underspend of £6m despite having to successfully deliver continued significant financial savings in 2012/13.
- Is aware of the continued and significant reductions in funding it is facing and in this context is continuing to identify ways of ensuring service sustainability and new ways of working.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor T. Martin as to why the error of £607k did not result in a qualification, Mr. Barker advised that it was considered to be a presentational error which was not material to the accounts. Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Resources, advised that the error had occurred in the asset register which had not reflected the replacement of the Tavistock Car Park with the Software Centre.

Councillor N. Wright congratulated all the officers involved in overseeing the Council's accounts and stated that she was delighted with Mr. Barker's report. With regard to page 3 she asked Mr. Barker to expand on his references to the key challenges the Council would face in the future. Mr. Barker replied that the Auditors would constantly assess the implications for the Council's accounts of issues such as the new models of service delivery, the externalisation of care and support and the local asset backed vehicle. In particular, significant challenges would be posed by the need to provide Council Group Accounts, both for the officers in the preparation and Mazars in the auditing. Ms. Tognarelli added that her Service were aware of the prospect of Group Accounts and the Technical Team had been producing shadow Group Accounts in preparation.

The Chairman referred to the prudence of the Council in setting aside earmarked reserves and media reports of Government criticism of Local Authorities' reluctance to spend their reserves. He asked Mr. Barker's view on the matter who replied that it was true the Council had maintained a good level of reserves however there was a need for it to do so.

The Chairman having thanked all concerned for the work which resulted in such a positive Annual Audit Letter, he thanked Mr Barker for his attendance and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Request for the Inclusion of an Item

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) on a request received from Councillor Howe that the following item be placed on the agenda for consideration at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee:

'Ex-Services Personnel in Sunderland: Health Inequalities and delivering the Armed Forces Community Covenant.'

(For copy report – see original Minutes)

Councillor Howe explained that the Scrutiny Committee would be asked to receive a presentation on current activities in relation to health inequalities around services for veterans and on delivering the Sunderland Armed Forces Community Covenant.

Discussion ensued on the matter. Mr Caddick explained that in effect Councillor Howe's request had been overtaken by events. The Armed Forces Network were currently doing a series of sessions for Members, staff and partner organisations, covering the points raised in the report. He believed that it would be more appropriate to let the sessions take their course and review the position thereafter. If it highlighted any outstanding issues then a decision could be made to bring it before the Committee.

The Chairman agreed and stated that he could not see what value it would add by bringing the matter before the Committee at this stage.

Councillor Howe asked whether former Councillor Graham Hall was aware of the sessions? Mr Caddick replied that he was and that he was actually assisting him to deliver them. Councillor Kay reassured Councillor Howe that he had recently met Mr Hall in passing with the Deputy Leader. He had been more than happy with the approach being taken and believed it to be a better way of taking the issue forward.

5. RESOLVED that the issue did not merit any response beyond noting the matter, pending a review of the position at the end of the financial year.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Chief Executive 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 8 October, 2013.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

A copy of the latest notice (issued on 5th November, 2013) was tabled for Members' information.

The Chairman asked any Members having issues to raise or requiring further detail on any of the items included in the notices, to contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Ms. Helen Lancaster for initial assistance.

6. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions as detailed above be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2012/13

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the work programme for the Committee's work being undertaken during the 2013/14 council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Lancaster having advised that the programme would be revised to reflect the referral of the Integrated Wellness Services item to the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel, it was :-

7. 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).

Consideration having been given to the report it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the update of the Lead Scrutiny Members be received and noted.

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

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.