

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 13th FEBRUARY, 2014 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

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

Also Present:-

Councillors F. Miller, N. Padgett and D. Snowdon

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Waller Ms R. Elliott.

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th January, 2014

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16th January, 2014 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no interests declared.

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairman advised that item 12 on the agenda (Request for Inclusion of Item) would be taken at this juncture. This would allow the members of the public attending only to hear this matter to leave the meeting thereafter. This would be followed by item 6 (Building Participation in Physical Activity, Leisure and Sport) and item 5 (2013 – 2014 School Performance). The agenda would then revert to the order of business as printed.

Request for Inclusion of an Item

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated), on a member request received for the inclusion of an additional item in the Scrutiny Committee work plan.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The request had been received from the Lead Member for Health, Housing and Adult Services (Cllr Shattock) and related to a proposal to reduce the operating times of 10 Sea View Road West Respite Centre.

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Ms. Meg Boustead Head of Children's Safeguarding. She apologised that the proposal to reduce the operational nights from 7 to 5 appeared to some that a decision had already been taken. This was not the case. It had always been a proposal to make the situation more sustainable in the long term. She assured those present in the public gallery that the proposal had now been withdrawn following the concerns raised by so many parents. There would now be a full scale review of all services for disabled children in partnership with parents to come up with a joint solution to a situation that was currently not sustainable. She welcomed the involvement of the Scrutiny Committee and estimated that the review would take approximately six months.

Councillor Shattock thanked Ms Boustead for addressing the meeting at such short notice and also to her colleagues in the Washington East Ward for drawing the matter to her attention in the first place.

The Chairman then welcomed Mr Regan who spoke on behalf of the parents attending. He stated that 10 Sea View Road was highly valued by the parents and children. For many it was the only help they received and the only light at the end of the tunnel. As far as the parents were concerned there was no alternative. The proposed 2 day closure represented a 30% cut. The savings that would accrue were minimal in the overall scheme of things but would have a massive impact on the lives of the families using the service. He stated that as far as the parents were concerned they wanted to maintain the status quo. They wanted a 7 day service at Sea View Road, not extra cash or extra social workers. They didn't care what Ofsted thought of the Centre. They were the end users and they valued it. The parents wanted more Sea View Road not less.

2. RESOLVED that the information supplied by Ms Boustead and Mr Regan be received and noted and that the Committee and or relevant Scrutiny Panel be involved in the holistic review of services for children with disabilities.

Building Participation in Physical Activity, Leisure, and Sport

The Executive Director of People Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the committee of the work being undertaken to develop a policy position for participation in physical activity, leisure and sport and which also requested the Committee to commission the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Panel to act as the consultative group to gather views and comments to contribute to the production of the policy position.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Panel be commissioned to drive the policy position forward and act as a consultative group in the process.

2012 – 2013 Schools Performance

The Executive Director of People Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed the Committee on the school performance data for the academic year 2012/2013 in relation to Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 pupils. To compliment the report, members received a presentation which provided a commentary on the performance statistics and the key themes emerging from an analysis of standards undertaken by the School Improvement Team.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Members welcomed the general improvement in standards but noted that looked after children still appeared to be at a disadvantage when compared to others. The Committee stated its desire to see that this gap continued to close.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman offered his congratulations to the pupils, staff and all concerned in delivering the improved performance.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that a letter be sent to the Executive Director of People's Services commending all involved in delivering the improved performance figures.

Reference from Cabinet - 12 February 2014 – Budget and Service Reports

(A) Collection Fund 2013/2014

(B) (i) Capital Programme 2014/2015 and Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2014/2015, including Prudential Indicators for 2014/2015 to 2016/2017.

(B) (ii) Revenue Budget and Proposed Council Tax for 2014/2015 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2015 to 2016/2017.

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated), seeking the advice and consideration of the Committee on a number of reports considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 12th February, 2014, on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme for 2014/2015 to assist the Council with its service and financial planning arrangements.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

Ms Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Resources presented the report and addressed comments and questions from Members.

Councillor Kay referred to the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream. He stated that the current figure of 6.26% was not a problem but advised that it may become one if it rose significantly above the estimated 14% in 2016/17. Ms Tognarelli replied that it was something that the Council would have to keep an eye on but that it would continue to invest in its assets. To this end the Council had increased its capital programme over the last three years as it sought to regenerate the city without recourse to revenue spending.

In response to Councillor Kay's observation that in terms of treasury management, achieving optimum yield on investments appeared to be the poor relation behind the liquidity of investment and security of capital, Ms Tognarelli explained the operation of the Lending list and the flexibility of approach. Councillor Kay welcomed the approach being taken in this regard which he felt had not been fully reflected in the narrative of the report.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kay, Ms Tognarelli advised that as far as the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was concerned, Sunderland Council carried out the treasury management of all LEP funding in its role as the accountable body.

Councillor Kay referred to paragraph 3.9 (page 93 of the agenda papers) which highlighted that during 2013/14 the Council did not employ any external fund managers with all funds being managed by its in house team. Added to this its performance was in the top quartile of all local authorities. He stated that it was a great headline that the Treasury Management function was performing so well. Ms Tognarelli added that the Council was also the best performing Metropolitan Authority in terms of treasury management and had the lowest long term debt of all Metropolitan Councils.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor N. Wright, Ms Tognarelli confirmed that the differences in the final financial settlement from central government had been so minor that they had no impact on the proposals going forward. With regard to a further enquiry from Councillor Wright, Ms Tognarelli confirmed that the delivery of the savings proposals would be monitored by reports to the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Ms Tognarelli for her report, and having thanked her and her team for the work they had carried out to prepare the budget proposals in such difficult financial circumstances and having commended the overall performance of the Council's treasury management function, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the Council be advised that the Scrutiny Committee having expressed its disappointment with the final Local Government Finance Settlement commented that, having considered the proposals, it was happy to support the detail within the Budget and Service reports and therefore supported the Cabinet recommendation to the Council that the budget proposals be approved.

Scrutiny Policy Reviews 2013/2014

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Scrutiny Committee with the draft recommendations of two of the scrutiny policy reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Lead Members and their supporting Panels.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Coordinator advised that detailed evidence gathering for the two policy reviews before the Committee had taken place from June 2013, with the City Services and Children’s Services Scrutiny Panels agreeing the content, conclusions and recommendations of the final reports at meetings throughout January and February 2014. The final reports of the two policy reviews were now submitted to the Scrutiny Committee as follows:-

Panel	Policy Review Topic
Children’s Services	Child Obesity
City Services	Alcohol and Licensing in Sunderland

For ease of reference the recommendations from each of the Policy Reviews were set out in paragraph 3 of the covering report.

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer (on behalf of Councillor Waller) and Councillor Bonallie briefly introduced the Policy Review they had undertaken thanking both the Panel Members for the work they had done and the relevant Officers who had been involved, for the support and assistance they had provided.

Councillor N. Wright commended the work of the panels together with the People and Place Boards which she felt were excellent vehicles through which change could be delivered.

Ms Lancaster having advised that the recommendations would be monitored on an annual basis, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the two scrutiny policy reviews (presented as appendices A and B to the report) and the recommendations arising from them as outlined in section 3 of the report, be endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee and submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its April 2014 meeting.

Member Development Opportunity

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Scrutiny Committee members with details of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Annual Conference to be held at Local Government House, Westminster on Tuesday 10th June, 2014.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that approval be given to the attendance of two members and one officer at the CfPS Annual Conference to be held at Local Government House, Westminster on Tuesday 10th June 2014

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 11th February, 2014.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

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

Annual Work Programme 2013/14

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).

9. 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:-

10. 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.