

At a meeting of the WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE held at WASHINGTON SCHOOL, SPOUT LANE on THURSDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor G. Miller in the Chair

Councillors Fletcher, Kelly, Lauchlan, F. Miller, Padgett, I. Richardson, Thompson, D. Trueman, H. Trueman, Wake, Walker and Williams.

John Rostron	-	City Services
Brian Hodgkinson	-	City Services
Lorraine Hughes	-	Children's Services and Sunderland PCT
Faye Gething	-	Children's Services
Karon Purvis	-	Chief Executives
Karen Alexander	-	Chief Executives
Dawn Rugman	-	Chief Executives
Marion Marshall	-	Commercial and Corporate Services
Paul Wood	-	Commercial and Corporate Services
Neil Revely	-	Health, Housing and Adult Services
James Third	-	Nexus
Colin McCartney	-	Gentoo

Members of the Washington Community

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Scaplehorn and Snowdon and John Chapman.

Declarations of Interest

Marion Marshall, Solicitor provided Members with a short presentation on Declarations of Interests.

Item 2a – Progress Report on 2011/12 Work Plan

Councillor Miller declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the Education and Heritage Project Update as Managing Director of TWEBLO.

Item 2b – Financial Statements and Proposals

Councillors Thompson, H. Trueman and Williams declared personal and prejudicial interests in the Call for Project applications for Activities for Young People as Members of the Oxclose and District Young People's Project.

Councillors Fletcher and Walker declared personal and prejudicial interests in the Call for Project applications for Activities for Young People as Trustees of the Washington Millennium Centre.

Councillor Williams declared personal interests in the Call for Project applications for Activities for Young People as she had acquaintances in SNCBC and in Job Linkage.

Councillor Walker declared a personal interest in the Call for Project applications for Support and Co-ordination for NEETs as an employee of Gentoo.

Councillor Kelly declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the Community Chest application as Chairman of the Harraton and District Community Association.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 28th July, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 28th July, 2011 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment.

On Page 7 of the minutes, under Operation Choice, Councillor Williams referred to the lack of Police Constables visiting the schools, not the Youth Bus as mentioned.

Community Action in Washington: Progress Report on 2011/12 Work Plan

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update of progress against agreed actions in the current year's (2011/12) Work Plan (Annex 1).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karon Purvis, Area Officer presented the report and introduced Karen Alexander, Employment and Training Manager to update the Committee on the Employers Demand Survey and the Washington Business Breakfast.

Councillor Wake referred to the transport barriers mentioned in the report and commented that if a person really wanted employment, they should be willing to walk to a bus stop if necessary and felt that there was a perception that some people considered certain jobs were beneath them.

Councillor Wake raised concerns on the issue of how employers request experienced workers and how young people are supposed to gain the required experience.

Councillor Wake also felt that young people were not gaining the necessary social skills/work ethic that had been achieved through working milk rounds and paper rounds for instance in previous times.

Ms. Alexander referred to the transport issues and stated that there were barriers which were not insurmountable but the main problem was that funding had been withdrawn which provided young people with help for transport and lunch costs etc. The removal of this funding had dissuaded some people from taking up voluntary work or training.

Ms. Alexander also commented that she took on board the point that some young people could walk to their place of employment and that this was the focus of the report in trying to recruit Washington based people into Washington based businesses.

Councillor Kelly commented that he had attended the Business Breakfast and a concern raised by employers had been that young people were constantly being geared towards further education rather than work opportunities and this had led to the misconception that employers could not recruit 16 year olds.

Councillor Kelly also commented that if we were to move forward, we needed to have more contact and interaction with businesses and that he was concerned there had not been many major businesses groups at the Breakfast event.

Ms. Alexander wished to reassure Members that they were in close contact with big businesses such as Nissan, who have a massive commitment towards apprenticeships and supporting young people. In terms of the Washington Area in particular, there was a need to ensure the young people in Washington were the best equipped to take up such opportunities.

Councillor Kelly commented that there was a need for discussions between schools and businesses as our schooling needed to change as it was not gearing young people for a life in work.

Ms. Alexander informed the Committee that with the removal of Connexions, the Schools would be charged with the responsibility of providing career advice.

As a Chair of Governors for a school, Councillor Kelly raised concerns on how they would cope with the added responsibility, due to budgets being tightened.

Lorraine Hughes, Health Lead, Children's Services advised that as responsibility for career guidance was to move to schools, many would not have the time or funds to help.

Councillor I. Richardson enquired if any job matching had occurred through the Business Breakfast and if those employers were offering any opportunities that a 16 year old wanted.

Faye Gething, Lead Personal Adviser commented that through the survey carried out it was found that out of the vacancies available for 16-18 year olds, there were 21 in Sunderland and only two in Washington, which highlighted the fact there were very few positions for young people to go into.

Councillor H. Trueman commented that the Business Breakfast had been an excellent event and also informed of a recent event at the Nissan Centre where some employers indicated they could not gain access to apprentices, despite money being available and that they had had concerns of mixed messages being given with schools steering pupils more towards academic studies.

Ms. Alexander commented that there were mixed messages and that funding was available for apprenticeships but they had to get the correct match of employers and people with the relevant education/skills. Ms. Alexander also acknowledged that it was a complicated issue as there was a need for employers to be more realistic in terms of demands for qualifications.

Councillor Wake raised concerns over the statistics of young people with poor Maths and English skills and also the large number of pupils studying such topics as Environmental Studies and Media Studies, qualifications which he believed would perhaps not help gain employment.

Councillor Wake also expressed concern that the schools would be taking over the role of Connexions when they did not have the money or time to do so and it should not be their responsibility to find pupils' jobs.

Ms. Alexander advised on the need to involve schools a great deal more to engage with children earlier, rather than when they leave schools at 16 years of age and there was a big push to encourage science, technology, engineering and mathematics to pupils also which could be positive in light of the Low Carbon agenda we have.

Councillor Williams commented that as a Chair of Governors she was fully aware that budgets were tight and it was the schools job to educate, with their success judged on academic achievements. It was therefore unfair to seek to blame schools for all that was wrong with the employment issues and felt the best way to proceed was to work with the hard to reach families.

Ms. Alexander advised that a point that emerged from the Business Breakfast was on the need for parents and families to help guide young people also.

In relation to the Business Breakfast, Councillor Kelly commented that he felt the point sadly missing from the event, had been the young persons point of view, as this would have been helpful to get their feedback and provide a balanced approach. Councillor Kelly requested the Area Committee look at this.

Ms. Alexander advised that Ms. Gething had provided a presentation on the feedback the young people had given but they could look into providing a greater representation of young people at the event.

The Chairman enquired if the employers at the event had been asked for their thoughts on how they would tackle the lack of apprenticeships.

Ms. Alexander advised that employers had stated the wish for the process to be less complicated and to have a closer relationship with the schools. They had also expressed the wish for work experience to be more on their terms and perhaps be held over the schools holidays.

The Chairman commented that in the past, opportunities for apprenticeships had been plentiful yet now the perception seemed to be that apprenticeships were for those who could not pursue an academic route.

Ms. Alexander agreed that there was a need to address the negative perception of apprenticeships.

Councillor Wake commented that he felt apprenticeships were perceived as a dumping ground and that reform was needed as this was clearly an incorrect perception.

Ms. Alexander advised that a dedicated employer, a suitable young person and a good deliverer were the three elements needed to get the process right.

Councillor Wake referred to the SIB Call for Project applications and the proposal to allocate £100,000 in funding and suggested that money could be given to a business such as Nissan to help part fund a number of apprenticeships instead.

Councillor Kelly commented that he had been on the Task and Finish Group which had worked on this issue and advised that he would be scrutinising whichever application was successful as he wanted to see people delivered into employment as we owed it to the young people of today to help create opportunities.

Councillor I. Richardson commented that it was important the young people actually wanted to be there so we needed to ascertain what opportunities they wanted and try to match them.

At the Chairman's proposal it was agreed that the Employment Task and Finish Group be reformed to continue on with the issue and to provide some scrutiny of the project to be carried out.

Washington Work Space Project

Berni Whitaker, Enterprise Manager updated the Committee on the Washington Work Space project advising that there were a number of significant challenges on the project as the Authority did not own any significant land in Washington so the potential developers scheme would have to have land attached to it in their proposals. Ms. Whitaker advised that the Authority had made attempts to purchase land but this was not possible due to the developers high asking price.

Ms. Whitaker commented that they were trying to develop a scheme to provide a fully planned application to the Government and also informed of the two stage procurement process, advising that they would hopefully know who would be managing the workspace by December 2011, with nine months to a year for construction and completion by April/May 2013 with a view to open in the Autumn of that year.

In response to Councillor Kelly's query, Ms. Whitaker advised that they did not know where the workspace was likely to be put but there were only a certain number of sites that it could be located and the best sites had been specified as closely as possible in the tender documents. As the tendering process has to be open, the possible sites would depend on proximity to major infrastructure, access to services/facilities and not in a place of isolation, so efforts to hone down the best possible sites have been made in the process.

Councillor Kelly referred to the starter nursery units in Washington which had now become garages and fast food establishments and queried if Officers had looked at what businesses the workspace would be aiming for.

Ms. Whitaker advised that an employment survey in Washington was undertaken at the beginning of this year to look at business premises need and it was envisaged that the building would have a mix of workspace and offices to cater for all issues of need.

In response to Councillor Kelly's request, Ms. Whitaker commented that she would be happy to provide regular updates on the progress of the project.

Councillor Wake suggested that the unused Crowther Industrial Estate units be used instead, as this already had the infrastructure in place and would be a great deal cheaper than the project proposed. Councillor Wake also suggested that in those areas in private ownership and which were falling into disrepair, owners should be made to address the dilapidated states of their property or be made to sell the land to the Council, forcing action to be taken one way or the other.

Ms. Whitaker advised that the problem of dilapidated buildings would be an issue for her colleagues in Property Services to deal with.

Councillor H. Trueman commented that we wanted the best for Washington, so it would be appropriate to apply for the £6 million funding, and get the best possible facilities for the area.

Councillor Kelly commented that the funding was only available for a new build and could not be used to refurbish existing facilities in the area, such as Crowther Industrial Estate.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 3.4.2 of the report and enquired if the request for a further extension had been submitted to CLG.

Ms. Whitaker advised that an extension had not been requested as yet and they did not anticipate the request to be a problem as they were looking to study the details of tender documents once the closing date had passed so they could submit a more detailed proposal.

Tackling Health Inequalities

The Chairman commented that there had been no Washington Councillors partaking in the Health Champion project and that he would like to see some increased interest.

Councillor Kelly advised that the role did require a commitment of time but some Washington Members had started to sign up to the project.

Councillor Williams commented that she would be interested in participating if further information could be provided.

Attractive Neighbourhood

Brian Hodgkinson, Washington Area Response Manager advised that they were hitting their targets in terms of Members requests and meetings were ongoing between Officers and Persimmon Homes to pursue a solution on their ownership of responsibilities.

The working partnership with Gentoo was being strengthened through the Love Where You Live campaign and work was also being carried out with the Galleries Management Team to combat the issue of discarded shopping trolleys.

Mr. Hodgkinson also advised of the Northumbria in Bloom awards and that they would be moving from seasonal grass cutting into winter work, pruning, etc.

Washington Area Network

Jacqui Reeves, Area VCS Network Representative updated the Committee on the findings of the recent VCS Network meeting.

John Rostron, Area Community Manager commented that one of the positive outcomes from the meeting had been that Springwell Community Association was to 'Buddy up' with Harraton C.A. to share expertise.

2. RESOLVED that Members noted the report, progress updates and actions as detailed in the report and in the Work Plan attached as Annex 1.

Community Chest and Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB) – Financial Statement and Proposals for Further Allocation of Resources

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to request the Committee's consideration of proposals for the allocation of the Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB) and Community Chest to support initiatives that would benefit the area.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

SIB Call for Projects – Support and Co-ordination for NEETs Projects

Councillor Kelly moved that the Officers recommendation for Sunderland North Community Business be agreed, which was seconded by Councillor Padgett and agreed by the Committee.

Councillor Kelly requested that representatives of the project provide clarification on their proposals.

Councillor Kelly sought assurances that Members would be given open access to the projects and details such as actual numbers, where placements would be, etc. Councillor Kelly also commented that as it was a large amount of the Committee's budget he wanted to make sure they were working with Washington based people and that it was an opportunity to liaise with young people to obtain their opinions.

Councillor Williams enquired if they would be employing staff or using those already in place.

The representative of the project advised that they did have trained staff in place from the soon to be cut Job Linkage but would advertise for specialised skilled workers should they need to.

In response to the Chairman's query, the representative confirmed that money had been put aside for a Young Person's Officer.

Councillor Williams enquired how they planned to include the Youth Development Groups.

The representative advised on the need for discussions with the Groups as they have commissioned youth providers in other areas to use their database of intelligence and they did not want to duplicate services already in place.

Ms. Gething enquired as to how they would recruit young people to the project.

The representative advised that the training centres had been inundated with young people looking for apprenticeships and it was more of an issue in getting employers on board. Incentives would be offered to young people and those hard to reach in trying to address the barriers already mentioned.

In response to Councillor Kelly's enquiry, the representative advised that they were prepared to work with local Councillors on the project and that they would like to attend the Task and Finish Group to see what needs were identified.

The Chairman commented that he expected 40 employees to be produced out of the project.

SIB Call for Projects – Activities for Young People Projects

Councillor Kelly moved that Officers recommendation to approve the application made by SCC Youth Development Group be agreed, which was duly seconded by Councillor Padgett and agreed by the Committee.

Councillor Kelly commented that he was most pleased to see provision for youths that did not revolve around football alone

3. RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (i) note the financial statement set out in Section 2.1 of the report;
- (ii) agreed the recommendations set out in Annex 1a with reference to SIB applications and approved 1 SIB amended proposal from the 2011/12 budget of £7,500 as a contribution towards the Washington Illuminations Switch On;
- (iii) agreed the allocation of £99,900 SIB to deliver the Washington NEETs Support and Co-ordination Project (Call for Projects) to the Youth Opportunities Project, Lead Agent SNCBC;
- (iv) agreed the allocation of £11,000 SIB to deliver the Activities Programme for Young People (Call for Projects) to the Youth Development Group, Lead Agent SCC; and
- (v) approved the 15 proposals for support from 2011/12 Community Chest totalling £8,617 a detailed in Annex 2 of the report.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.