

LEAD SCRUTINY MEMBER UPDATE: APRIL 2015

JOINT REPORT OF THE LEAD SCRUTINY MEMBERS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of each of the six Lead Scrutiny Members and supporting Panels.

2. LEAD SCRUTINY MEMBER UPDATE

Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair (Cllrs Norma Wright and Tom Martin)

Safeguarding Working Group – Update

- 2.1 The Safeguarding Working Group met on 17th March 2015 and were introduced to Colin Morris, the independent chair of Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board. The working group were informed that new governance arrangements would come into operation from April 2015, with a change of membership on the safeguarding board. The new board would consist of approx. 15 people who would in the main be Chief Officers, or their nominees, from within key organisations.
- 2.2 The importance of scrutiny's involvement with the board was also highlighted and how scrutiny's role was around asking those often difficult questions of the group. It was agreed at the latest meeting of the working group that it would be appropriate to speak with a number of people both internally and externally of the organisation, with individuals being issued with the questions and the panel holding a Q&A session. To ensure the manageability of the process it was also agreed to hold 2 such sessions with approx. 3/4 witnesses at each session.
- 2.3 Cllr Wright also requested that Members outside of the Scrutiny Committee should be aware of the work being undertaken by the working group and also the council as a whole, through a communication from the Chair of Scrutiny.
- 2.4 The working group also received a brief update on the improvement work that had been taking place. Members were informed that the improvement plan was based on 5 outcome themes to provide a basis for improvement. The working group was also informed that the plan had involved a wide staff engagement process including fortnightly emails and focus groups. It was reported that this initial work had started to pay dividends in that the council had started to receive positive feedback from partners as an outcome of this work.
- 2.5 The working group in moving forward will look to liaise with the independent chair of the Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board and The Executive Director for the People's Directorate to arrange Q&A sessions with a number of safeguarding partners to discuss issues around child sexual exploitation. The working group will also be provided with key documents that will assist the group during their investigations as well as providing information to all Members around the improvement work being undertaken.

- 2.6 The working group will continue to provide updates to the Scrutiny Committee, as and when appropriate, through the Lead Scrutiny Member Update Report.

Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee

- 2.7 The NECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 24th March in Newcastle. The meeting included monitoring of the Strategic Economic Plan, review of performance of Nexus, and consultation on the proposals for devolution for the NE region. This was the final meeting of the municipal year. A new work programme will be developed for the NECA Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16 which will include a policy review across the seven authorities.

NE Regional Scrutiny Network

- 2.8 The Network met on 27th March in Gateshead. The main item on the agenda was the different approaches being taken to tackling the autism agenda within local authorities, with the example of a scrutiny review from Gateshead being highlighted as a possible area of good practice.
- 2.9 The Network also met with Tees Valley Unlimited to talk about developing the economy in the Tees Valley and the progress of the Tees Valley LEP.

Children's Services (Cllr Debra Waller)

- 2.10 The Panel has finalised its review of child and family poverty and met on 31st March to agree a set of recommendations.
- 2.11 The review examined the large body of evidence confirming that early disadvantage tracks forward, to influence later life. One of the biggest impacts can be achieved by intervening in the early years, with these years being formative for establishing healthy lifestyle choices. This is not only important in terms of the immediate impact on children's health and development, but the benefits also extend into adulthood with the associated savings for adult services.
- 2.12 The Panel's recommendations, set out elsewhere on this agenda, focus on the emerging Child Poverty Needs Assessment and Child Poverty Strategy.

City Services (Cllr David Snowdon)

- 2.13 On 16 March 2015, the Panel considered the final draft reports of its reviews into Cemetery Regulations and the Medical Examiners Service. The Panel emphasised the importance of ensuring that the changes to the cemetery regulations suggested in the report were broadly consulted upon and were introduced in a sensitive manner. A copy of the report is included on this agenda. A copy of the report is included on the agenda.
- 2.14 The Panel also received a further monitoring report into levels of flytipping in the city. The Panel agreed that it would be useful to receive regular reports on this issue carrying on into next year.
- 2.15 On 8 April 2015, the Panel met to consider an update report on the progress being made in relation to alcohol and licensing in the city. This issue was the subject to a policy review by the Panel during 2013/14. The Panel also heard about the steps being taken to

tackle the dangers of older and vulnerable people being targeted by rogue traders and the problems being caused by those 'cold calling' to offer services on the doorstep.

Health, Housing and Adult Services

- 2.16 The panel have concluded their evidence gathering and have prepared their draft final report on the issue of tackling loneliness and social isolation. The full report and draft recommendations are presented to the Scrutiny Committee for final approval.
- 2.17 The review has been extremely interesting and Members of the panel have fully engaged in evidence gathering activities throughout the course of the year. The panel also undertook a number of commissioned items, as requested by the Scrutiny Committee, and this provided a degree of variety to the work of the panel. The HHAS Scrutiny Panel are looking forward to the annual scrutiny debate and the opportunity to discuss potential topics for next year.

Public Health, Wellness and Culture (Cllr George Howe)

- 2.18 The Panel met on 23rd March to take the final evidence for a review of Legal Highs. The Panel heard from Trading Standards in relation to local enforcement.
- 2.19 Legislation is available through consumer regulations, but there are barriers. Firstly, there is no standard compliance tool for these products. Regulations require showing that an 'average consumer' has been influenced by misleading information, such as when NPS are labelled as 'plant food', or 'bath salts', yet, most consumers know exactly why they are buying these products and so are not being misled.
- 2.20 The Panel concluded by agreeing some draft recommendations for the review of Legal Highs. At the same meeting, the Panel agreed its recommendations for a review of Suicide Prevention – both are set out elsewhere on the agenda.

Skills, Economy and Regeneration (Cllr Dianne Snowdon)

- 2.21 Since the last meeting of the Committee, the Panel has met twice. Firstly to meet with representatives from the University and the schools sectors in order to discuss the measures being taken to satisfy the future skills demands of the city. The Panel highlighted the important work going on at the University in developing skills and the importance of trying to encourage levels of graduate retention. Reference was also made to the growing influence of the business sector in contributing to the design and content of qualifications and training. The Panel also heard about the way in which the Education and Skills Strategy has been rolled out across the city in order to better prepare our young people for the world of work.
- 2.22 A further meeting of the Panel was held on 7 April 2015, when the Panel considered and agreed its final report on the future proofing of skills in the city. A copy of the report is included on this agenda.

Responsive Services and Customer Care (Cllr Ronny Davison)

- 2.23 At its meeting on 19th March 2015, the Panel considered the draft final report on the implications of recent Welfare Reform legislation. The Panel highlighted the very substantial impact that the welfare reforms were having on the income levels of many families. The Panel considered it important for the Council to continue to adopt a range of strategies to support clients; including the targeting of information campaign to raise

awareness among those affected; personal support to help manage finances and avoid arrears. A key issue for the future will be the impact of Universal Credit. The Council has an important role to provide via partners support and ensuring that the city is prepared and has planned ahead. A copy of the report is included on this agenda.

- 2.24 On 2 April 2015, the Panel agreed the content and recommendations of its review into the operation of Food Banks. The report highlights the massive increase in demand for food banks in recent years at both a national and local level. The Panel commends the enthusiasm and commitment of the people providing support through food banks. However, the Panel does have concerns at the danger of a developing dependency on the service and the degree to which the service is masking weaknesses in the welfare system. A copy of this report is included on this agenda.

3. CURRENT PANEL MEMBERSHIPS

- 3.1 Non-executive Members have now been allocated to a scrutiny panel, membership of the panels has been decided in accordance with current political arrangements.
- 3.2 A complete membership of the Scrutiny Panels is attached for information at **Appendix 1** of this report.

4. DEDICATED SCRUTINY BUDGET

- 4.1 A small budgetary provision of £15,000 per annum is available to the Scrutiny Committee and the supporting Panels to deliver the agreed Annual Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.
- 4.2 As of 31st March 2015 the breakdown of the budget stood as follows:-

Description	£
Scrutiny Development	£5,249.90
Member Development	£2,466.45
Policy Review Development	£642
Total Expenditure to Date	£8,358.35
Budget	£15,000
Remaining Budget	£6,641.65

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee;

- (a) notes and considers the update of the Lead Scrutiny Members and receives a further verbal update at the meeting where appropriate, and
- (b) notes the current expenditure and remaining scrutiny budget for 2014/15.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Scrutiny Committee Agenda and Papers – 12 March
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MEMBERSHIP OF THE SIX SCRUTINY PANELS

<p style="text-align: center;">City Services</p> <p>Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr David Snowdon</p> <p>Cllr James Blackburn Cllr Michael Essl Cllr Stuart Porthouse Cllr Steven Foster Cllr Lynda Scanlan Cllr John Wiper</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Health, Housing & Adult Services</p> <p>Cllr Jill Fletcher Cllr Alan Emerson Cllr Rosalind Copeland Cllr Darryl Dixon Cllr Michael Dixon Cllr Shirley Leadbitter Cllr Barbara McLennan Cllr Dorothy Trueman</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Children's Services</p> <p>Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr Debra Waller</p> <p>Cllr Florence Anderson Cllr Linda Williams Cllr Doris MacKnight Cllr Anthony Farr Cllr Philip Tye Cllr Jacqui Gallagher Cllr Bob Francis</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Skills, Economy & Regeneration</p> <p>Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr Dianne Snowdon</p> <p>Cllr Bob Price Cllr Michael Dixon Cllr Christine Marshall Cllr Mary Turton Cllr Billy Turton Cllr Len Lauchlan Cllr Tom Wright Cllr Peter Wood</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Public Health, Wellness & Culture</p> <p>Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr George Howe</p> <p>Cllr Louise Farthing Cllr Fiona Miller Cllr Julia Jackson Cllr Rebecca Atkinson Cllr David Errington Cllr Richard Bell Cllr John Cummings Cllr Shirley Leadbitter</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Responsive Services & Customer Care</p> <p>Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr Ronny Davison</p> <p>Cllr Betty Gibson Cllr Barry Curran Cllr Anne Lawson Cllr Iain Kay Cllr George Thompson Cllr Gillian Galbraith Cllr Lee Martin Cllr Margaret Forbes</p>