

At a meeting of the WEST SUNDERLAND AREA COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 10th APRIL, 2008 at 5.00 P.M.

Present:-

Councillor D. Forbes in the Chair

Councillors Allan, Arnott, Gofton, Old, J.B. Scott, P. Watson, S. Watson, A. Wilson and T. Wright

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors L. Martin and Morrissey.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 7th February, 2008 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Strategic Initiatives Budget – Regeneration Issues Report

Pennywell Community Centre Development – Councillor S. Watson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter as the Chair of Pennywell C.A.

Sandhill Cluster Primaries Life Channel Project – Councillor Allan declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the application as a governor of Hastings Hill Primary School and Thorney Close Primary School. Councillor J. B. Scott declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the application as a governor of Hastings Hill Primary School.

Barnes Community Cohesion Project – Councillor Allan declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter as a member of the Management Committee of the A690 Youth Project.

Presentation from Northumbria Police on Crime Rates Relating to the West Sunderland Area

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Inspector Jackie Clarke who presented a report detailing the crime statistics for the West Sunderland Area for the period April 2007 to March 2008. She advised the Members that crime in the area had reduced and that most of the targets set had been surpassed.

(For copy statistics – see original minutes).

Councillor A. Wilson asked where drug crimes would show on the figures. Inspector Clarke advised that drug crimes were not shown in the figures.

Councillor Allan asked how the West Area compares with other areas of Sunderland and how it compares with Newcastle.

Inspector Clarke stated that the West Area was the best performing area in Sunderland with the East Area being the second best performing area. She advised that she was unaware of how the area compared with Newcastle but would find the information.

Councillor Allan then queried whether Inspector Clarke was reasonably satisfied with the staffing levels.

Inspector Clarke commented that she was satisfied and felt that there was not a need to change the staffing levels in the area.

Councillor P. Watson congratulated the police on their efforts in reducing the crime rates and advised that Sunderland is the safest big city in the north of England.

Inspector Clarke commented that there was a media department to promote the good work done by the police across Sunderland and advised that an e-policing newsletter had been set up which people could subscribe to.

Councillor Arnott commented that the reduction in crime had been noticeable however youth disorder had still been a significant problem in the area and that there was still scope for progress in crime reduction.

Inspector Clarke advised that there had been a large reduction in the amount of reported anti social behaviour and that the regeneration in the area should have an impact on the level of anti social behaviour as it would help to create a stronger sense of pride in the neighbourhoods.

The chairman having thanked inspector Clarke for the presentation it was:

2. RESOLVED that the presentation be received and noted.

Minutes of the Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPS)

The Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving Group submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the committee with the minutes of the last meeting held on 29th January, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Inspector Clarke introduced the report and welcomed any comments from the members.

Councillor Arnott commented that previously the minutes stated the Wards and asked if Councillor Allan could raise the issue at the next LMAPS meeting as the information was useful.

Councillor Allan stated that Inspector Clarke was the chair of the group however he would raise the issue at the next meeting.

Inspector Clarke advised that the minutes were sanitised and that the original minutes contained the ward information. She also stated that there was to be a new format developed which would make it easier to read.

Councillor Arnott stated that he understood why the minutes were sanitised but he felt that the minutes were too far removed from the originals.

3. RESOLVED that the LMAPS Minutes for the meeting held on 29th January, 2008 be received and noted.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit Progress Report

The City Treasurer submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the performance of the Benefits Section in the processing of new claims for Housing and Council Tax benefit.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Steve Atkinson, Benefits Manager, introduced the report and advised that there had been a bad start, as there had been software problems delaying the claims following Christmas although over the last three months the claims have been processed quicker than the target time which had meant that while the Best Value Performance Indicator Target had been missed the performance had exceeded the Department for Work and Pensions performance targets.

Councillor Arnott commented on the abolition of the ten percent tax band and asked whether there would be an impact on benefits.

Mr Atkinson stated that the change would not have an effect on benefits.

Councillor T. Wright stated that the Housing and Council Tax benefits were means tested and as such would change for people whose income had changed.

Mr Atkinson replied that the benefit was worked out using gross income so the change in tax bands would not affect the number of people eligible to claim Housing or Council Tax benefit.

Councillor Allan commented that there was a requirement to help those who need benefit and that there should have been efforts undertaken to make people who were eligible but not claiming aware of the fact that they could claim Housing or Council Tax Benefit.

Mr Atkinson advised that it would be difficult to test everyone to ensure that everybody eligible was claiming as people's circumstances can change. He also stated that there was the right number of people claiming benefits and that people were often reluctant to fill forms in.

Councillor Allan then stated that it would always be possible to do more.

Mr Atkinson agreed that people sometimes needed to be persuaded to make claims.

Councillor P. Watson commented that the figures were interesting and stated that the ten percent tax band helped everyone, not just those on lower incomes and that a new approach to helping the worst off was required.

Councillor Arnott commented that the abolition on the ten percent tax band would hit the working poor and that it would be a disincentive for people to move into employment from benefits.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Northern Children's Book Festival

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the Northern Children's Book Festival held between 5th and 17th November, 2007.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Sue Anderson presented the report and advised the Members that the festival was an annual regional event which was intended to promote reading and books to children and parents.

Councillor P. Watson commented that it was an excellent project and thanked everyone involved for the work done.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Attainment Outcomes for Schoolchildren Living in Sunderland West in 2007

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with a summary of the National Curriculum assessments for Primary and Secondary Schoolchildren living in Sunderland West.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Norma Hardy, Head of Performance Improvement & Policy, presented the report and advised that there had been a steady improvement in the attainment over the last five years.

Councillor Gofton commented that the Key Stage 2 results were fantastic and queried the dip in results at Key Stage 3.

Ms. Hardy replied that there was a natural dip in the results at Key Stage 3 although the fall in results to below the national average was a concern although the continued upward trend was good.

Councillor Gofton then asked what strategies were in place for improvement.

Ms. Hardy advised that there were national strategies and a school improvement team in place and that there was a focus on improving Key Stage 3 performance as there had always been a drop in achievements at this level.

Councillor P. Watson commented that there had been a good job done which resulted in the increased trends however there had been some anomalies. He also asked what Personal, Social and Emotional development was.

Ms. Hardy advised that Personal, Social and Emotional development was aimed at young children and was designed to improve their skills in relating to their peers and adults and also their wellbeing.

The chairman commented that there were more schools in the West area than any other area of Sunderland and as such it was understandable that the attainment for the area is slightly lower.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Development of Local Area Plans

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the development of the Local Area Plans.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Richard Parry, Area Regeneration Officer, presented the report and advised that the Area Profile is still in draft format and that a copy of the Area Profile which would form the Local Area Plan was attached as an annex to the report.

Councillor Gofton commented that the Area Profile was a very interesting document with useful information included and that it was possible to use the information to draw conclusions on the performance of the area.

Mr Parry replied that at the moment the document was over 60 pages long and that it was planned to develop a statistical annex so that the profile could be read as a document while the graphs and statistics would be available in the annex.

Councillor Arnott commented that as the document was a work in progress then it should be returned to the committee regularly and that it would be useful if the changes were highlighted.

Mr Parry stated that it was a good point however it would be difficult to highlight the changes as the document changed in format and that the current version is a completely different format to the original.

Councillor P. Watson commented that Mr Parry was brave to try telling the members about their own area and that there were changes needed to be made to the Profile.

Mr Parry advised that the document was currently only a foundation and that once the content had been agreed there would be a meeting with the Councillors in order to develop a layout the Members are happy with.

Councillor Arnott suggested that in the next municipal year a working group could be set up to meet regularly in order to give input into the document as workshops would not give as in depth a look at the document.

Mr Parry agreed that this was a good suggestion.

The chairman commented that there were a lot of schools in the area and that it was good to see input regarding the schools. He also commented on the Dewhirst factory and what plans the Council had for the building.

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Regeneration Issues Report: Feedback on Projects Previously Funded Through Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB)

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with information on the following project which it had previously funded through its SIB allocation:-

- St. Anne's R.C. Primary School 'Early Years Outdoor Learning Environment Project'

Richard Parry, Area Regeneration Officer, introduced Christine Lynch in respect of the project who proceeded to provide Members with a commentary on her feedback report and questions thereon.

The Chairman having thanked Mrs Lynch for her presentation, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB): Regeneration Issues Report

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) on the proposed allocations of Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB) funding to support the following initiatives of benefit to the area:-

- (i) £36,666 as a contribution to 'Pennywell Community Centre Development' Project
- (ii) £17,200 as a contribution to the 'Sandhill Cluster Primaries' Life Channel' Project
- (iii) £9,000 as a contribution to Plains Farm Primary School's 'Premier Play' Project
- (iv) £2,500 as a contribution to the 'Eco Schools in Sunderland' Project
- (v) £23,281 as a contribution to the 'Barnes Community Cohesion' Project.

In addition the committee Members were also requested to extend the European Package Development Phase 2 project until 31/12/2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Richard Parry, Area Regeneration Officer, presented the report and advised that the 5 applications for funding before the Committee were requesting £86,647 in total from the 2008/2009 budget. Should the committee grant the request, a balance of £241,573 would be left in the budget.

Mr Parry provided Members with a summary of the applications and introduced Edna Rochester in relation to the Pennywell Community Centre Development, Moya Thirlwall for the Life Channel Project and Premier Play Project, Sam Palombella for Eco Schools in Sunderland and Lee Ferry for Barnes Community Cohesion Initiative who addressed comments and questions from Members.

Consideration having been given to the items it was:-

9. RESOLVED that approval be given to the allocation of Strategic Initiatives Budget Funding of:-

- (i) £36,666 as a contribution to 'Pennywell Community Centre Development' Project
- (ii) £17,200 as a contribution to the Sandhill Cluster Primaries' 'Life Channel' Project
- (iii) £9,000 as a contribution to Plains Farm Primary School's 'Premier Play' Project
- (iv) £2,500 as a contribution to the 'Eco Schools in Sunderland' Project
- (v) £23,281 as a contribution to the 'Barnes Community Cohesion' Project
- (vi) Extension of the European Package Development Phase 2 project until 31/12/2008.

Strategic Initiatives Budget: 2008/2009 Ward Based Community Chest

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) on 11 projects recommended for support from the 2008/2009 Community Chest Scheme in request of the Barnes, Pallion, Sandhill and St. Anne's Wards.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

10. RESOLVED that approval be given to the 11 projects recommended for support from the 2008/2009 Community Chest budget with a total value of £4410 as detailed in Annex 1 of the report.

Strategic Initiatives Budget: Ward Based Community Chest – Return of Unclaimed Funding from Previous Years.

The Chief Executive and City Treasurer submitted a joint report (copy circulated) which provided details of the unclaimed Community Chest Approvals and requested agreement that the funds be returned to the Community Chest budget for reallocation.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Richard Parry, Area Regeneration Officer introduced the report and advised Members that the funds to be returned were the unclaimed approvals from 2005/2006 and the carry over of the unallocated Community Chest budget from 2007/2008. The total amount was £25,448.

Councillor P. Watson commented that it was disappointing that there were projects which had not used all of the funding allocated to them and that he would prefer to see the allocation spent.

11. RESOLVED that the funding be returned to the Community Chest Budget.