

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 APRIL 2015

SCRUTINY POLICY REVIEWS 2014/15

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SCRUTINY AND AREA ARRANGEMENTS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Scrutiny Committee with the draft recommendations of the scrutiny policy reviews undertaken by the Lead Scrutiny Members and their supporting Panels.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The scrutiny commissioning model is now in its third year. As part of the arrangements the Scrutiny Committee commissioned the Lead Scrutiny Members along with their respective scrutiny panels to undertake up to two policy reviews during 2014/15, the topics having been brought forward from discussions at the Annual Scrutiny Debate in May 2014.
- 2.3 Detailed evidence gathering for the policy review has taken place since June 2014, with the scrutiny panel's agreeing the content, conclusions and recommendations of the final reports at meetings in March and April 2015. The final reports are attached **(Appendix A-F) as below:**

Report	Panel	Policy Review Topic
A	Health, Housing and Adults	Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation
B	City Services	Cemetery Regulations and the Introduction of a Medical Examiners Service
C	Responsive Services and Customer Care	i. Impact of Welfare Reform on Sunderland ii. Operation of Food Banks in Sunderland
D	Skills, Economy and Regeneration	Future Proofing of Skills
E	Public Health, Wellness and Culture	i. Strategies for the Prevention of Suicide ii. Tackling New Psychoactive Substances
F	Children's Services	Tackling Child Poverty in Sunderland

3. POLICY REVIEWS 2013/14 – PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

HHAS Scrutiny Panel

- 3.1 The recommendations of the ***Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation in Sunderland*** Policy Review 2014/15 are:-

- a) To ensure that there is an effective launch and continued promotion of the community directory to local people, key stakeholders and providers;
- b) To explore and understand with key partners how a community connector scheme would operate in the city including issues of promotion, recruitment and training that enables anyone who wishes to take part the opportunity to do so;
- c) To look at how to develop arrangements to ensure that activities / initiatives are co-ordinated in order to minimise the potential for duplication and to provide a forum for sharing, learning and good practice;
- d) To ensure that a measure of loneliness and/or social isolation is included in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment;
- e) To look at through integrated care the development of shared intelligence and how to ensure the use of all intelligence to help predict the softer issues within communities such as loneliness etc.;
- f) To explore the potential of an employee volunteer scheme within the council to provide opportunities for employees to volunteer their help to a local organisations, communities and projects;
- g) To explore the potential for adoption of the Campaign to End Loneliness evaluation tool on the effectiveness of interventions on loneliness once it is released.

City Services Scrutiny Panel

3.2 The recommendations of the ***Cemetery Regulations and the Introduction of a Medical Examiners*** Service Policy Review 2014/15 are:-

- a) That a review be undertaken into the Council's Cemetery Regulations and that this include the development of a clear overall policy statement;
- b) That the review include provisions governing kerb-sets and that the Council work retrospectively to bring up to standard;
- c) That given the sensitivity of the issues involved a consultation plan be established involving the Council website and engagement with key stakeholders;
- d) That officers investigate the possibility of establishing friends groups at older sections across the cemeteries.
- e) The Council continue to work with partners to prepare for introduction of Medical Examiners Service;

- f) That the financial implications of introducing the Medical Examiner be examined in more detail including the options for the funding of the service;
- e) That any consideration of future funding options take into account the sensitive nature of the service and likely issues of affordability

Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel

3.3 The recommendations of the ***Impact of Welfare Reform on Sunderland*** Policy Review 2014/15 are:-

- a) That the Council continues to work with its partners and other agencies to help to mitigate the impact and hardship resulting from welfare reform on the people of the city;
- b) That the Council continues to work with Jobcentre Plus in order to improve the clarity of information provide to claimants, particularly to prevent the unnecessary application of sanctions;
- c) That the Council and its partners continue to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit across the city and monitor its effect on the pilot areas.
- d) That the Panel expressed its support for the continuation of the Council Tax Support at its current level during 2015/16;
- e) That the Panel supports the content and eligibility criteria suggested for the amended Crisis and Community Care Support schemes as set out in the report.

3.4 The recommendations of the ***Operation of Food Banks in Sunderland*** Policy Review 2014/15 are:-

- a) that the Council looks into the practicalities of offering to purchase freezers for those food banks who express an interest;
- b) that the Council work with the Network to help to broker discussions with those supermarkets who provide surplus food on ways of providing transport for delivery;
- c) that more research be undertaken by the Network into the number and location of food banks, luncheon clubs and subsidised food outlets in the city;
- d) that joint working continue with Jobcentre Plus to make claimants more aware of the operation of welfare benefit sanctions, short term benefit advances and the existence of emergency payments;
- e) that the Council works with the Network to help to dispel myths surrounding use of food banks.

Skills, Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel

- 3.4 The recommendations of the ***Future Proofing of Skills*** Policy Review 2014/15 are:-
- a) Look at measures to improve the engagement of local businesses, the health and care sector and other public employers in primary and secondary schools, such as the work currently being delivered through the Economic Leadership Board's Work Discovery Sunderland programme.
 - b) That the Council and its partners continue to work to raise the profile of firms operating in growth areas such as advanced manufacturing and software sectors;
 - c) That the Council and its partners look at ways of raising the profile of apprenticeships and vocational training for example through highlighting local successes stories;
 - d) That further work be undertaken to look at measures to increase the interest of girls and young people in areas such as advanced engineering, software and information technology.

Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel

- 3.5 The recommendations of the ***Strategies for the Prevention of Suicide*** Policy Review 2014/15 are:-
- a) The Health and Wellbeing Board should receive a report annually from either the director of public health (representing a suicide prevention group) or a representative of the group on delivery of the suicide prevention action plan.
 - b) There should be evidence that a Suicide Needs Assessment has informed a suicide prevention action plan in the city.
 - c) There should be evidence that the Suicide Prevention Action Plan is informed by the most relevant up-to-date intelligence specifically in relation to:
 - Measures to address self-harm prevention
 - Lessons learned from suicides in Sunderland
 - d) Appoint a Councillor Champion who would have the role of: facilitating communication between the suicide prevention group and other groups and bodies including the health and well-being board; facilitating regular communication about the work of the suicide prevention.

3.6 The recommendations of the ***Tackling of New Psychoactive Substances*** Policy Review 2015/15 are:-

- a) Explore the options for an enforcement strategy including
 - the use of new Anti-Social Behaviour powers and;
 - the use of all available local powers.
- b) Join the lobby requesting the Government to draft legislation to outlaw the sale and distribution of legal highs by creating a blanket ban for it to be a criminal offence knowingly to advertise, sell, supply, import or export legal highs.
- c) As a priority, pursue targeted prevention interventions with children and adults at high risk of use or current users in institutional settings. This will include work in hostels (including targeted activity by the Substance Misuse Service), children in care, and support for schools to detect and prevent the use of NPS on their premises.
- d) To investigate the options for maintaining a profile of incidents, intelligence and data on NPS to support decision making.

Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

3.7 The recommendations of the ***Tackling Child Poverty in Sunderland*** Policy Review 2014/15 are:-

- a) The Child Poverty Needs Assessment should continue to be developed in a way that is evidence based and is informative about local deprivation data, to encourage officers and Members to use it to inform local planning and strategy.
- b) Opportunities should be taken to maximise the take up of entitlements available to disadvantaged families. This includes
 - the take up of free nursery education offered to disadvantaged two year olds and;
 - the number of children taking up free school meals, using an assumed consent model (thereby ensuring schools claim their full pupil premium entitlement).
- c) Options for disadvantaged children to access to a nutritious meal during school holidays, where they meet the criteria for free school meals, should be explored.

- d) To consolidate all 'key worker' style approaches across the city to ensure that families can work with one key mediator and are given consistent messages
- e) Locally based services should be available for parents, such as parenting support, which encourages and enables parental behaviour change where needed.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee considers and endorses the scrutiny policy review presented at **Appendix A-F**, and submits:
- (a) 4 Policy Review Reports to Cabinet at its meeting in June 2015; and
 - (b) the remaining 4 Policy Review Reports to Cabinet at its meeting in July 2015.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Scrutiny Committee Agenda and reports: 26 June 2014

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