

**At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on TUESDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2024 at 4.30 p.m.**

**Present: -**

Councillor Burrell in the Chair

Councillors, Dixon, Fagan, Foster, Johnston, Leonard, and Scanlan.

Also in attendance: -

James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, SCC

Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, SCC

Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive, Sunderland Culture

Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration, SSC

James Garland, Principal Funding and Commercial Officer, SCC

Members of the Press

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Watson

### **Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Committee held on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2024**

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024 were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **Cultural Sector Update**

The Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture submitted a report (copy circulated) to inform of the progress of the cultural sector and its impact on the local economy of the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture was in attendance to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation.

Councillor S. Johnston commented that as Ward Councillor for St Peters it would be remiss of him not to raise the issue of the Glass Centre and its future. Councillor Johnston advised that he had spoken to many of the stakeholders involved who have said it is their wish to keep it open and that the stumbling block appeared to be the University. Councillor Johnston enquired if Sunderland Culture could act as a mediator in this regard to try and save the facility.

Ms Ball commented that this was a very important issue for the City and she was aware that the University were pursuing a number of options around relocation and as far as she was aware those negotiations were ongoing and no decision had been made as yet. In terms of Sunderland Culture's role they have been talking to the Council on how, as a City they could nurture the Glass Centre heritage and that the skills and jobs were protected. Ms Ball added that the Arts Council had awarded a small amount of funding and that she could circulate the brief for this and would be interested to hear the feedback on this.

In response to Councillor Dixon's query over Sunderland Cultures involvement with the Concerts provided by Sunderland AFC, Ms Ball advised that they were not involved but they did have close communications with the Councils Comm's department around messaging and how they could help amplify those. In relation to other Events in the City the BID had a series of events, some they worked on and some they didn't but they did not have an overview of all Events.

Councillor Dixon queried as to the future of the Winter Gardens once the Culture House was completed. Ms Ball advised that the café within the Winter Gardens was temporarily closed and conversations were ongoing with a new provider so it was envisaged that the closure was only temporary. There was some work on redevelopment plans to the ground floor for a refresh of the Winter Gardens and successful funding had been acquired for this. Work was ongoing to continue to build, nurture and invest in the Winter Gardens.

Councillor Dixon wished to congratulate Officers on the amount of funding obtained since our unsuccessful City of Culture Bid, which was ultimately won by Coventry and queried if they felt that not winning had been a blessing in disguise given the problems that it created for Coventry and if they had considered re-entering for future competitions.

Ms Ball agreed that Coventry did have a tough time during their City of Culture as this was during the pandemic and it would be interesting to see how Bradford, as the latest winner would do in 2025. If successful it would speak to the impact of the competition.

Ms Auld advised that in terms of future entries, this hadn't been discussed with more of their focus being on the day to day delivery and more of a city wide approach.

Councillor Dixon referred to a recent Planning and Highways Committee in which an application for a play area in Seaburn was approved and commented that the area seemed to be on the up and that we could do more in terms of events, similar to what South Shields were doing and requested that if Sunderland Culture could have any input, that it would be most welcome.

Councillor Leonard referred to the PowerPoint presentation and the particular slide headed Impact and Reach – 2022/23 in which it stated “900 paid artists days” and enquired how many of the people were from Sunderland. Ms Ball advised that she did not have this figure at hand but the majority were from Sunderland or from the wider North East but she would find out the specific detail.

Councillor Leonard informed the Committee that she had attended a couple of the Cultural Spring events and had thoroughly enjoyed them but suggested that perhaps tickets could be distributed to school children as they hadn't appeared to be particularly well attended. Ms Ball advised that she would pass that feedback onto the organisers.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked Ms Ball for her attendance. it was then:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Multiply Programme - Update**

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with an update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Multiply programme and their implications for Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and James Garland, Principal Funding and Commercial Officer were in attendance to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation and to answer any Members queries.

In response to Councillor Fagan's query over what was happening around Norfolk Hotel, Mr Garland advised that the intention was for creative business spaces within different phases with small workshops and offices.

Councillor S. Johnston referred to Priority 1 and enquired if there had been any discussions with the Council about improving/tidying up the street scene in the City and also if there was any information on the impact within individual areas as well as across the city.

Mr Garland advised that there was nothing in relation to Public Realm improvements as yet but that wasn't to say they couldn't look at this in the future. Sunderland City Council would have to come forward with an initiative and it hadn't been registered as a Call for Projects. Ms Auld advised that there was ongoing dialogue alongside the current programmes.

In terms of impacts across the City and individual areas, Mr Garland informed that this was certainly something they could reflect in the programme evaluation. Ms Auld added that they were developing the brief at present so could build in to draw out the local benefits.

Councillor Dixon commented that one of the biggest mysteries to him was the Software Centre and if it was going well or not. In relation to the Fund was there any link to the building, what was going on there at present and its occupancy levels.

Ms Auld advised that she did not have the occupancy figures to hand as this was not scheduled for the agenda but the DWP staff that were to use the building, no longer needed it so whilst the lease term was still current, they were not operating out of the building and therefore there was no footfall from them. They continued to review where they were across all of the Business Centres and she would take this away for feedback.

Councillor Dixon referred to the Sunnyside area and hoped that there was an element of joined up working and queried if this was a prominent area under consideration and what role the fund had in the context of this. Ms Auld informed that the Investment Plan was drawn up looking at where the priorities were alongside the City Plan and what partners considered important. The USPF was supporting, supplementing and feeding into but not driving the agenda.

Councillor Dixon commented that in relation to the Government funding, the expertise within the Council was doing extremely well in obtaining this and queried what their relationship was like with the Civil Servants involved. Ms Auld advised that Sunderland was successful as they were in a position where we knew what we wanted to achieve and therefore could tailor this to a particular investment and align to the conditions required. We also had a strong track record around delivery as by and large if the funding was awarded, the project would be delivered.

Councillor Leonard referred to the 56 Neighbourhood Community Improvements mentioned within the PowerPoint presentation and requested if there were any examples that could be given. Mr Garland informed that these would be projects led by the VCS or other partners for minor environmental improvements to the public realm for example. These had not been delivered yet therefore they would be able to bring examples once the project was up and running. Ms Auld added that they would look to bring examples to a future Committee meeting.

Councillor Foster wished to applaud officers for their presentation and to congratulate Mr Garland on the work that he had done on this and also on the CLLD work that Councillor Foster had also worked with him on.

In response to the Chairman's enquiry as to the next stream of funding identified, Mr Garland advised that it was currently a 3 year spending round and they were hoping to hear about details beyond the next year.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Ms Auld and Mr Garland for their attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

### **Screen Industries - Update**

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update on the development of screen industries in the city within the context of the North East Screen Industries Partnership

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Auld was in attendance to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation and to respond to any Members queries.

In response to Councillor Foster's query, Ms Auld advised that the programme Charlotte in Sunderland had been attracting people to tell their stories and Charlotte was a fantastic ambassador for the City.

Councillor S. Johnston wished to praise Ms Auld for the presentation, commenting that there was a lot going on but felt that the missing link appeared to be public engagement and that the opening nights/premieres were never available to the residents of the City and suggested that Keel Square be better utilised to showcase some of the programmes made in the area. Ms Auld commented that this was certainly something they could take away to pursue as it was really important to be connecting people into the productions themselves.

Councillor Scanlan referred to the list of productions made within the North East and suggested that the work done by Karen Noble at Pallion Action Group should also be included as there was lots of work done that was televised. Ms Auld informed that she would look into this.

Councillor Foster enquired over the Royalty Theatre and that it seemed to be left behind and if there was anything going on in this regard. Ms Auld advised that she was not aware of any links but she would investigate further.

Councillor Dixon informed that the Royalty Theatre was privately run with no Council funding that he was aware of and they did particularly well during pantomime season for example.

Councillor Dixon enquired as to the Catalyst behind the momentum of these productions and if it had been the Netflix show, Sunderland 'Till I Die. Ms Auld advised that the initial catalyst was discussions with the BBC where they were looking for regions to collaborate with. Our whole region came together to achieve this and the strategy was significant in being successful. Fulwell 73 also had people involved that had a personal connection with the City so those two things came together well.

Councillor Dixon commented that this situation would surely benefit our 16,17,18 year olds moving forward, to be able to use Sunderland as their base in the industry rather than having to travel outside of the area for work.

The Chairman referred to Channel 4 moving operations to Leeds and suggested that we link in with those also. Ms Auld informed that there were conversations over a partnership approach with Channel 4 who also do a lot around school engagement and she could possibly bring something around this on the next presentation to the Committee.

In response to the Chairmans enquiry, Ms Auld confirmed that Tees Valley were the accountable body that held the resource for the programme delivery.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked Ms Auld for the report. it was then:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

## **Annual Work Programme 2023-24**

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), which set out the current work programme for the Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Member's information and possible discussion.

5. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report

### **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2024 (copies circulated).

(For copy report and notice – see original minutes).

Mr Diamond reminded Members to get in touch if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

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

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

(Signed) M. BURRELL,  
Chairman.