

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors M. Dixon, Errington, Essl, Foster, Kay, Maddison, McClennan, Rolph and A. Wilson.

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor I. Richardson.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 16th November, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Performance Report Quarter 2 (April – September 2010)

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee with a performance update relating to the period April to September 2010, with regard to the following issues:-

- Progress in relation to the LAA targets and other national indicators;
- Progress in relation to the Review of Music Policy Review, Access to Housing Policy Review and Local Studies Policy Review Recommendations;
- Results of the annual MORI residents face to face survey which took place during May to July 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Gillian Robinson, Corporate Performance Monitoring Manager, together with Paul Allen, Performance and Information Manager, presented the report.

With regard to housing performance, Members were advised that the number of homeless prevention cases continued to be at a historically high level, but, compared to the April to September period in 2009/10, the number of cases had declined from 386 to 318 cases in 2010/11. The reasons for the decline were still being explored. It was possible that it was linked to a lack of awareness of the service, that more households were provided with housing advice across the City as part of advice services, including the third sector and partner organisations such as Gentoo. This would serve to reduce the need for council supported prevention actions, with residents able to find their own solutions.

The number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation had improved when compared to the same period in the previous year from 12 to 7. This was primarily due to the relatively low number of households who required temporary accommodation provision. The Council however would need to further reduce the utilisation of families in bed and breakfast accommodation, although this remained relatively low.

The service was currently working with private sector landlords and social housing providers in the city to address issues of access to longer term accommodation through the access to housing review. Initiatives such as the development of the citywide and sub-regional Choice Based Lettings policies would enhance resident's housing options. Part of the review had focused on improving sign posting between agencies that would help residents receive improved outcomes.

With regard to performance in relation to culture, the number of visits to museums per 1,000 population had declined when compared to the same period the previous year this included visits in person and pupil visits.

At the end of September 2009 it was 908 per 1,000 population this has fallen to 893 per 1,000 population at the end of September 2010.

The number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups had declined from 7,287 at the end of September 2009 to 5,214 at the end of September 2010. The visits by school children with their school were disappointingly low for the first six months of 2010/11. In order to address the concerns over school visits a working group of staff from the learning team had been established and they were consulting with teachers to consider how best to improve communication with, and services to, schools. Additionally, this group would investigate whether initiatives such as fund-raising to support transport costs would help address the problem. Staff were also planning visits to schools as an added benefit of the school visiting the museum.

With regard to Sport and Leisure, the City Council had continued to deliver and give priority to the following:-

- Developing modern, high class sport and swimming facilities that were comparable with most local authorities;

- Operating 7 Wellness Centres and 8 Community Wellness venues;
- Wellness service/preventative services, included:
 - Mums on the move
 - Wellness on 2 Wheels
 - Wellness Walking programme, Walks in the Park
 - Active Sunderland Project
 - Nordic Walking
 - Cycle Sunderland
 - Exercise Referral and Weight Management Programme
 - Lifestyle Activity and Food Programme
 - Workforce Health and Wellbeing Project

Specialist Services

- Specialist Weight Management Service
- Maternity Lifestyle Services
- Stop Smoking Service
- Football Investment Strategy, developing new facilities and pathways for participation;
- Specialist events and partnership working to deliver such activities such as the Active Sunderland Week, Niall's Mile, leisure centre's open weekend and the Beach Festival of Sports.

Members were advised that a comprehensive overview of the performance of Sport, Wellness, Aquatics and Play would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in February 2011.

In conclusion Members were informed of the progress made in implementing the recommendations arising from the Committee's policy reviews into Access to Housing, the Review of Music and the Local Studies review.

Councillor Foster referred to page 16 of the agenda and the reference to developing new facilities and pathways for participation under the Football Investment Strategy and asked for a progress report. Members were informed that no significant progress had been made since the last report as funding from the Football Foundation was still awaited.

With regard to the Ipsos MORI Residents Survey and the Community Integration in Regeneration Areas question, Councillor Rolph asked if the responses reflected the additional Community Cohesion work being undertaken in the Coalfield Area. Ms. Robinson replied that the findings were gathered prior to this work being carried out, however it would be interesting to see how it was reflected in the next survey.

Councillor Rolph noted that there was no measure of resident's satisfaction with regard to all events and not just flagship ones like the Airshow and Friendship Festival.

Ms. Robinson confirmed that they had been removed from the survey this year, although there was no reason why they could not be reinstated in the future. The results had always been very positive in the past.

Councillor Rolph commended the amount of information provided regarding Museum visits but asked if future reports could include information on visits made by Sunderland residents to the Tyne and Wear Archives Service.

Councillor Errington asked whether the survey could include a question on residents' impressions of the Council's play facilities following the recent investment programme. Ms. Robinson advised that the survey did include such a question and informed Members that the information had been reported to the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. There would be no problem in circulating the information to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee if Members wished.

Councillor McClennan referred to the decline in school visits to Museums and suggested that schools be surveyed to ascertain the reasons. Was it for Health and Safety, staffing or safeguarding issues?

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kay, Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, advised that he had asked for a report to be prepared which would provide a position statement with regard to repossessions and the predicted trajectory of increase. He advised that 75% of people in danger repossession had bought their properties under right to buy, had borrowed on the strength of their equity and now could no longer meet the repayments. The Government had indicated that they were minded to continue with the Mortgage Rescue Schemes. With regard to Councillor Kay's question as to whether people living in hostels were classified as homeless, Mr. Caddick advised that they were classed as being housed. Although the Council did not have a statutory duty to such people it could be argued that a moral duty remained. Hostel accommodation was not the best solution for their needs and Mr. Caddick believed that his service was there to provide the best possible options and outcomes for people.

With regard to the Housing Policy Review, Mr. Caddick advised that the 2nd Stage Consultation process was now under way. He advised that sessions would be arranged for Members in the new year and asked if Members wished him to arrange one specifically for this Committee. Members agreed that a specific session should be arranged for the Committee.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted; and
- ii) a briefing session be arranged for the Committee as part of the 2nd Stage Consultation process for the Housing Policy Review.

Sunderland Partnership Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented the draft Sunderland Volunteering Strategy to the Committee for Members' comments as part of the formal consultative process.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Graham Burt, Strategy Development Manager, presented the report providing Members with background information on the development of the Strategy and Action Plan together with details of the key elements of the Strategy itself.

David Curtis, Chief Officer of the Volunteer Centre, Sunderland was also present to assist with any questions or comments from Members.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Maddison, Mr. Burt advised that consultation with the Bangladeshi Community had been undertaken via the BME networks.

The Chairman asked whether there was a City Wide Network in addition to the five area VCS networks. Mr. Burt confirmed that there was and that an annual event was held at the Marriott each year for representatives from each network. Over the last 12 months the number of volunteers in the East had increased from 15 to 90, in the North from 30 to 100, in Washington from 50 to 60, in the West from 30 to 80 and in the Coalfield from 15 to 120.

Councillor Rolph stated that the figures were tremendously encouraging and reflected the excellent work being carried out by the Area Community Co-ordinators.

Councillor Rolph asked whether consultation was undertaken with people who did not volunteer with a view to removing barriers. Mr. Curtis confirmed that research had been undertaken with regard to this issue and the most popular response when asked why a person did not volunteer was that they had not been asked. With regard to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph regarding the impact of the Localism Bill, Mr. Burt advised that his service were still trying to extrapolate the likely effects.

Councillor Rolph highlighted the importance of students as volunteers. In times of job shortages students found an increasing need to enhance their CVs. This was often done through acting as a volunteer, however given the recent increase in student fees many may seek paid work rather than voluntary employment. She believed there was a need to improve people's understanding of the term 'volunteer' and questioned whether the use of the term 'hobby' and 'hobbyist' in the Strategy was belittling.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Foster, Members were advised that a Volunteering Tool Kit had been developed which included a CD Rom. To date over 400 kits had been dispatched. Mr. Curtis advised that the Volunteer Centre Sunderland had two development workers who could support people through the tool kit process.

Councillor McClennan referred to paragraph 4, page 10 of the Strategy and expressed concern that the Government may divert funding to other areas of the country where there were shortages of volunteers. Mr. Curtis replied that according to the MORI Survey, Sunderland were still seen as underperforming in this regard.

The Chairman highlighted her concern that local Councillors were not invited to attend meetings of the Area VCS Networks. Councillor Rolph concurred with this view and stated that it needed to be recognised that many local Councillors were volunteers too.

Councillor A. Wilson expressed a concern that the issue of CRB checks and their cost could be off-putting to potential volunteers. Mr. Curtis replied that no volunteer should have to pick up the cost of a CRB check and that the onus lay with the organisation concerned. Councillor McClennan stated that this was still a potentially large cost that small organisations may be unable to bear. Mr. Burt having confirmed that the Council did not have a budget to support organisations in this way, Councillor McClennan suggested that perhaps applications to the Ward Based Community Chest could be made for this purpose.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Burt and Mr. Curtis for their report and their attendance, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decision for the Period 1st January, 2011 – 30th April, 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st January, 2011 – 30th April, 2011 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer advised that the report on the Built Heritage would come to the Committee as part of the evidence for its Policy Review.

4. RESOLVED that the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

Work Programme 2010-11

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2010-11 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the Committee's Work Programme for 2010-11 be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and wishing them a safe journey home.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.