

**At a meeting of the COALFIELD AREA COMMITTEE held at EASINGTON
LANE COMMUNITY ACCESS POINT on WEDNESDAY, 13th JULY, 2011 at 6.00
p.m.**

Present:-

Councillor D. Richardson in the Chair

Councillors Anderson, Blackburn, Ellis, Hall, Heron, Scott, D. Smith, Speding, Tate
and Wakefield

Also in Attendance:-

A Allen		
Ron Barrass	Member of the Public	
Susan Brown	Area Community Co-ordinator	Sunderland Council
Allan Caddick	Head of Strategic Housing	Sunderland Council
Colin Curtis	Assistant Head of Street Scene	Sunderland Council
Cllr Juliana Heron	Member	Hetton Town Council
Pauline Hopper	Area Officer	Sunderland Council
Matthew Jackson	Governance Services Officer	Sunderland Council
Lisa Ketley	Empty Property Officer	Sunderland Council
Amelia Laverick	Member of the Public	
Vicki Medhurst	Cultural Heritage Manager	Sunderland Council
Malcolm Page	Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services and Area Lead Executive	Sunderland Council
Julie Parker	Public Health Practitioner	Sunderland TPCT
Ian Richardson	Assistant Head of Street Scene	Sunderland Council
Gerry Roll	Parks Manager	Sunderland Council
Beverley Scanlon	BSF Project Director	Sunderland Council
Alex Smith	Project Co-ordinator	North of England Civic Trust
Liz St. Louis	Head of Customer Services	Sunderland Council
James Third	Community Relation Officer	Nexus
Pauline Tsentas	Youth Development Group Manager	Sunderland Council
Lee Wardle	VCS Representative	

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Rolph and Inspector
Finlay.

Declarations of Interest

Item 02e – Strategic Initiatives Budget and Community Chest – Financial Update and proposals for further allocation of resources

Councillors Hall, Heron, D. Richardson and Speding declared personal and prejudicial interests as Council Appointed Members of the Houghton Feast Steering Committee.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 1st June, 2011

Councillor Anderson stated that the reason for her apologies being submitted to the last meeting was that she had been unable to get to the meeting as she did not have a car and it would have taken three buses for her to get there. She asked that in future Members who are travelling by public transport be considered when setting the venues for the meetings. She asked that her reason for being unable to attend be recorded.

Councillor Blackburn stated that on page 6 he had actually stated that the managers on buses 'were there to be approached' rather than the recorded 'were rarely approached'

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 1st June, 2011 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the above amendments.

Community Action in Coalfield – Progress Review

Heritage

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress that had been made on the committee's heritage priority.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Vicki Medhurst, Cultural Heritage Manager, and Alex Smith, Project co-ordinator, presented the update and advised the Committee that this work had commenced last year and the final report had been circulated to Members in May. There were other Area Committees were also progressing heritage as a priority and a meeting on this matter had been arranged for the Area Chairs. The Committees would be able to achieve more if there was a more joined up approach taken.

There were proposals for learning resources provided to schools through a call for projects should Members agree. There would also be Collections Management training so that local groups and interested parties would know how best to handle

and store historic artefacts. This was also to be funded through a call for projects should Members agree.

Councillor Anderson referred to the work which had taken place in Hetton, there had been work done with the local schools for the 60th anniversary of the Eppleton Pit Disaster and there had been exhibitions held which had been excellent. At these exhibitions the children had been able to see the pit banners and had been able to feel a part of their local area's history. All of the schools had taken part in a memorial service. She thanked everyone who had been involved in the organisation of these events.

Ms Medhurst stated that the Community Heritage Worker would allow for more events like this to take place as it would help groups to work together.

Councillor Ellis commented that she was a member of the task and result group and that there was a wealth of heritage in the area; the celebration of the heritage brought the community together and helped to educate the next generation on the history of their area.

Councillor J. Heron stated that it was good to see so many people attend the events. It was hoped that a permanent miner's memorial would be erected in Hetton to commemorate all miners, not just those who had lost their lives in pit disasters.

Councillor Heron advised that the NUM used to organise memorial services however following the demise of the quarries the services had not been held as regularly. This heritage meeting had seen attendance from organisations from all across the area.

Councillor Anderson then commented that it had been excellent to see such a good turn out at the heritage meetings; there had been representatives from many different groups and from all of the local schools. There were fundraising events which had taken place to provide funding to rebuild Hetton Band Hall at Beamish museum. The historic crafts such as mat making had been fascinating to see. She had also joined the miners march in Durham and it had been fantastic to see the revival of community spirit this march had created.

Councillor Scott, in relation to Herrington Banner Partnership, advised that they were the first group to get their banner renewed and they had taken the banner into schools before setting up a permanent base in the YMCA. It was expensive to keep the banners travelling throughout the area and it was difficult to get the funding.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a. The report be noted
- b. A Heritage Community Development Worker be appointed for 12 months via the SWITCH project.
- c. A maximum budget of £10,000 be made available for the Development Worker's on-costs and expenses.

- d. A call for projects with a £5,000 budget to produce learning materials and resources for schools be developed.
- e. A call for projects with a £5,000 budget to deliver collections management training be developed.
- f. A village atlas project with a budget of £7,000 be developed.
- g. Heritage trails and associated literature be further explored with the Wellness Team.
- h. The remaining budget be utilised by the Development Worker (via the Task and Result group) to progress further recommendations in the NECT report.

Youth Disorder/Activities for Young People

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members of the progress that had been made on the Youth Disorder and Activities for Young People priority and provided an update from the task and result group.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Pauline Hopper, Area Officer, presented the report and introduced Pauline Tsentas, Youth Development Group Manager, who was available to answer any questions.

Ms Hopper advised that £30,000 had been provided by Children's Services for the provision of positive activities including school holiday provision. £3,000 of this had already been allocated to holiday provision so far. The Task and Result group had created a timetable of activities for the summer.

The Committee was asked to consider the extension of the Ear 4 U project, this would cost approximately £7,600 to continue at the current level for 6 months or approximately £14,500 to increase the number of people the project could reach.

In the areas where interventions had taken place there had been a reduction in antisocial behaviour of 19 percent.

Beverley Scanlon advised the Committee that Keith Moore, Executive Director of Children's Services, was intending to attend the next meeting.

Councillor Speding stated that Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC) currently had a contract to provide youth provision in the Coalfield Area. He felt that a representative from SNCBC should attend the Committee and provide a report on what provision was being delivered across the area. He also expressed concerns that a group based in the North Sunderland Area was receiving the funding, it would be better if the funding could stay within the Coalfield Area.

Councillor Anderson stated that in Hetton there was a problem with young people hanging around in the bus station on the evenings.

Ms Tsentas advised that SNCBC's contract was to deliver three sessions per ward per week and it was planned that during the holidays there would be an extra session in each ward every week. She agreed to provide Members with a programme of activities.

Councillor Tate commented that the wards within the area were quite large geographically and while there was youth provision within each ward it was possible that areas within the ward could be neglected. He stated that Easington Lane had a lot of provision while Hetton did not get as much.

Ms Tsentas advised that there were activities held at the Hetton Centre and there were the XL Youth Villages which moved around the area.

Councillor Anderson then asked what activities were taking place in Hetton and Councillor Tate asked how many people attended the activities.

Ms Tsentas advised that there was information collected at every session which showed how many people had attended and also where they were from, Members should be receiving this information and she agreed to provide the information to the Members.

Councillor Speding then stated that it was important to ensure that there was no duplication in the provision of activities; if the XL Youth Village was at Herrington Country Park then there should not be other activities taking place in the vicinity at the same time.

Lee Wardle stated that when the XL Youth Villages were operating other organisations lost out. It was important to remember that it would take special activities to attract young people on a Friday night.

Ms Tsentas advised that it was a responsive project and there would be the XL Youth Village operating on the Racecourse Estate. There were proposals being looked at for the provision of activities in the Penshaw area.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a. The report of the task and result group be noted
- b. £10,000 of the Children's Services budget be used to increase the Responsive Youth Provision (RYP) project
- c. A programme of summer holiday provision for 11-19 and under 11 year olds be developed by SNCBC
- d. £30,000 SIB be allocated to youth provision to ensure junior provision is available
- e. A call for projects process be implemented for 'junior youth provision'
- f. Funding for the Ear 4 U project be continued for a further 6 months at a cost of £7,700
- g. The Executive Director of Children's Services be invited to attend the September 2011 meeting to provide an update on the future provision/ restructure of the service and what this means for area working
- h. Consideration be given to merging the Youth priority and the Play priority to form 'Activities for Young People'

Allotments and Community Gardens

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an update on the progress made on the Allotments and Community Gardens project and provided an update from the task and result group.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Pauline Hopper, Area Officer, presented the report and introduced Gerry Roll, Parks Manager, and Colin Curtis, Assistant Head of Street Scene, who were available to answer any questions. Ms Hopper advised that the task and result group had met since the last meeting of the Committee and they had agreed that there was a need for some funding to be made available to cover the costs of starting the works and it would be useful to arrange for workers from the SWITCH team to be brought in to assist the project. The group would be meeting again in early August and would report back to the September meeting. There needed to be a site visit to the allotments at Britannia Terrace in order to see what issues there were.

Susan Brown, Area Community Co-ordinator, distributed some photographs showing the results of a previous project and advised that the young people had taken part in a lot of activities and these activities linked in to all of the priorities, not just the Allotments priority. There was a lot of feedback from residents regarding empty allotments; people on the waiting list wanted to be able to take on the vacant allotments. Larger plots could become unmanageable and because of this there had been a lot of people had asked if they were able to move to smaller plots.

The Chairman commented that before and after pictures documenting the works undertaken were important.

Councillor Anderson stated that there was a lot of demand for allotments and referred to the popular Community Allotment in Peat Carr.

Councillor J. Heron advised that there was a Community Allotment at the Easington Lane Community Access Point and Gillas Lane Primary School had its own allotment. There were a lot of volunteers who were willing to give their time to help maintain these allotments.

Councillor Heron advised that it took a lot of money to tidy up the derelict allotments.

Councillor Scott stated that the two sites had been chosen as Burnside was a good site which needed only minor work while Britannia Terrace was a very poor site and would need a larger programme of works. The poor condition allotments were difficult to let as people did not want to take on sites which needed a lot of work. The allotments needed to be let to people who were going to use them however they needed to be tidied up first.

Councillor Anderson queried whether the Britannia Terrace allotments were council owned and having been advised that they were then stated that Ethel Wilson, Allotments Officer, had forced people to tidy up council owned allotments in the past.

The Chairman advised that it could be difficult to force people to tidy allotments as there were procedures which needed to be followed.

Mr Roll advised that there were now three Allotments Officers and the Coalfield Area had an Allotments Officer dedicated solely to the area. There was a survey of the allotments within the Coalfield and the possibility of offering unkempt allotments to people on the waiting list or to community groups was being looked into. Fencing, footpaths, water supplies and other facilities needed to be improved and new fencing was being priced. At Burnside the costs were expected to be around £30,000. Some new fencing had been installed at Burnside as the original fencing was in a dangerous condition.

Councillor Speding stated that it was important to look at the difference between allotments and gardens; a lot of areas were leased as gardens. He suggested that allotments and gardens be consolidated. He also advised that the rents on allotments kept on going up but there was no investment in facilities on the sites.

Ms Brown advised that there were a number of small organisations who were doing good work; an example of this was Penshaw C.A. who had a community garden and had received SIB funding to enable the installation of benches and other features.

Councillor Scott commented that in general, allotments across the Coalfield were in an appalling condition; there was a need to get the sites cleaned up and then let out to people who wanted allotments.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- a. The report of the task and result group be noted
- b. The £5,665 approved at the March 2011 meeting be used for improvements at the Burnside allotment site
- c. A comprehensive audit of the Britannia Terrace site take place before any programme of work be planned
- d. £30,000 be allocated to the improvement of allotment sites throughout the Coalfield area.

Empty and Problematic Properties

The Chief Executive submitted a report (Copy circulated) which informed Members of the progress which had been made on the empty and problematic properties priority.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Alan Caddick, Head of Strategic Housing, presented the report and advised that within Sunderland there were 2,255 empty properties and within the Coalfield Area there were 379 properties which had been empty for over 6 months. In the last year the target for properties brought back into use had been exceeded however there was still the desire to perform even better.

There were benefits for the Council if empty properties were brought back into use as it would result in Council Tax being paid on the property and there was the New Homes Bonus which would see the Council receiving further funding should the property meet the criteria. An empty property was a wasted property.

He asked that Members provide feedback on the action plan; this would then be used when developing the final plan which would be presented to Cabinet for approval in September 2011.

Councillor D. Smith queried how many Empty Dwelling Management Orders had been issued. Mr Caddick advised that there was a briefing note which he would provide to Ms Hopper for circulation to Members. He also advised that properties needed to be empty for at least 2 years and also attract vandalism for it to be possible to issue an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO). There had only been approximately 20 of these orders used across the whole country.

Councillor Hall stated that this was a huge project and expressed concerns that there was a concentration on Copt Hill and Hetton wards; there was an issue in Shiney Row with there being a number of empty properties within a couple of streets which had a negative impact on the area. In Herrington there was a property which had been boarded up for years.

Mr Caddick advised that the priority was reducing the number of empty properties in Wards which were above the city average; the other areas would not be forgotten though. There was a need to look into preventing houses from becoming empty. It was possible that some long term empty houses would be well looked after and there was a need to find the owners of empty properties and find out why the property was empty.

Councillor Hall then suggested that regular feedback would be useful, especially for the properties Members had raised as issues. Mr Caddick advised that there was a plan of the whole city which showed all of the empty properties and also showed which properties had been empty for over 2 years and identified Gentoo and former Gentoo properties.

Councillor Scott queried how many of the empty properties are in a condition where they could be let out immediately. Mr Caddick advised that approximately 80 percent of the empty properties were in good condition. Councillor Scott then stated that orders should be put onto properties requiring them to be brought back into use or should be compulsorily purchased. Mr Caddick stated that empty properties were not desirable and Members should provide him with details so that he could investigate them.

Councillor Anderson stated that it was pleasing to see that this subject was receiving so much attention. It was unbelievable that there were so many properties which had been empty for so long. Housing was a big problem; there was a lack of decent, affordable housing. She queried how the council could track owners down and what powers could be used to acquire these properties. In the past powers had been used to gain possession of houses owned by the National Coal Board (NCB) in order to modernise them.

Mr Caddick advised that the briefing note would contain details of the powers the Council had. The government was changing the way housing was allocated and also the Council's responsibility for homeless people. Currently homeless people needed to be asked if they would consider private rentals in addition to social rentals; there would be a change which would see the privately rented housing being treated the same as social housing and as such there would be an increase in the number of houses available to be offered to people and an increase in the usage of properties. The Council wanted to be able to refer people to high quality housing.

Lisa Ketley, Empty Properties Officer, advised that it was not always easy to find property owners; the council tax and land registry lists were used however the land registry was not always up to date.

Councillor J. Heron stated that the Hetton Downs area had been blighted by empty properties however the empty properties were preferable to some of the private landlords who let the properties to nightmare tenants who cause a lot of problems for their neighbours. Some private landlords did not care what their tenants were like or what problems they caused for neighbours as long as the rent was paid. The NCB houses used to be desirable until the coal board sold them off in blocks of 6 to the private landlords.

Councillor Heron stated that 20 years ago there had been a problem with empty council houses; over the last 10 years these empty houses had been demolished however despite 300 of these houses being demolished there were still 260 empty properties in the area and 300 people on the list for Gentoo houses. There had been demolitions going on for the last 10 years and there were still no plans for development.

Councillor Blackburn suggested that the Ward Bulletin service could be used for listing empty properties; this would enable Members to see what progress was being made on tackling properties they had reported. Properties which were at risk of becoming empty were a concern as there was a need to work to prevent these properties from becoming empty. 'Ghost Streets' caused by long stretches of empty properties were also a major concern; in Easington Lane there were terraces along the main road which were completely empty.

Mr Caddick advised that methods of communicating more effectively were being examined. Private landlords were an issue across the city and there had been studies into the regulation of private landlords; the government wanted to see the introduction of minimum standards for private rented accommodation. There was a need to look at how the Council's powers could be used to tackle landlords in

problem areas. He suggested that someone could attend the next meeting to advise the committee of the work involved in the action plan.

Councillor Heron stated that he did not think that the authority had the powers to be able to deal with the problem.

Councillor Speding commented that this was one of the biggest problems the Council faced and that in the area there was a lot of housing which had been constructed to provide housing for people working in the industries. In Shiney Row there was a property which had been empty for 18 years, it had been bought by an investor and left empty and had cost the area a lot. In Stanley Street there had been some of the worst condition housing in Sunderland and it was now empty land. One empty property on a street was enough to kill the street and the cost of taking the landlord to court would be less than the loss to the street should no action be taken. There was a chain reaction as people were forced out of their neighbourhoods by private landlords which then resulted in more private landlords moving into the area.

The Chairman agreed that a high profile court case against a nuisance property owner could have a good effect on encouraging others to tidy up their property.

Councillor Hall stated that Councillors worked on weekends and evenings in addition to during the day and if officers were to be working at weekends then the Members would be available to be able to help them. Mr Caddick welcomed this as he wanted there to be a good relationship between Members and officers.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- a. The information on the New Homes Bonus be noted
- b. The action plan be given consideration
- c. The empty property targets be agreed
- d. Updates be provided by the lead agent through the Work Plan progress reports.

Work Plan 2011/12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider the Committee's work plan for the year 2011/12.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Pauline Hopper, Area Officer, presented the work plan and advised that if Members had any questions they could either raise them in the meeting or alternatively contact her directly outside of the meeting.

Ms Hopper then introduced Liz St. Louis, Head of Customer Services, who would be presenting an update on the review of means of residents accessing Council information.

Ms St. Louis advised that 40 percent of the respondents had stated that they wanted more information to be available online. The work to increase the level of information available was commencing with welfare rights information being added.

It was understood that not everyone had internet access at home and as such there were plans for public access computers in libraries and customer service centres which would allow residents to access online information.

6. RESOLVED that the work plan and update from Ms St. Louis be noted.

Community Chest, Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB) and Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) – Financial Statement and Proposals for Further Allocation of Resources

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which requested Members to consider proposals for the allocation of SIB and Community Chest to support initiatives which would deliver activity against priorities for 2011/12.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Pauline Hopper, Area Officer, presented the report and advised Members of the three proposals for SIB funding which were detailed in paragraph 2.1 and Annex 4 of the report and the 13 requests for Community Chest funding which were outlined at paragraph 2.2 of the report and detailed in full at Annex 5 of the report.

Councillor Hall advised that the application for Community Chest for Penshaw Community Association was for 'Penshaw Scarecrow Trail' rather than 'Penshaw School Trail' as was shown in Annex 5.

7. RESOLVED that:-

- a. The financial information set out in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 be noted
- b. The SIB applications totalling £65,000 be approved.
- c. The 13 proposals for Community Chest funding be approved.

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

(Signed) D. RICHARDSON,
Chairman.