

At a meeting of the WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE held at the GRANARY, ARTS CENTRE WASHINGTON on THURSDAY, 28TH JULY, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Scaplehorn in the Chair

Councillors Kelly, Lauchlan, F. Miller, G. Miller, Snowdon, Thompson, D. Trueman, H. Trueman, Walker and Williams

John Rostron	-	City Services
Brian Hodgkinson	-	City Services
Helen Green	-	City Services
Liz St. Louis	-	City Services
Lorraine Hughes	-	Children's Services
Faye Gething	-	Children's Services
Karan Purvis	-	Chief Executives
Karen Alexander	-	Chief Executives
Alison Patterson	-	Chief Executives
Andrea Seymour	-	Commercial and Corporate Services
Paul Wood	-	Commercial and Corporate Services
Neil Revely	-	Health, Housing and Adult Services
Alan Caddick	-	Health, Housing and Adult Services
Jacqui Reeves	-	Washington Mind
James Third	-	Nexus
Colin McCartney	-	Gentoo

Members of the Washington Community.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Fletcher, Padgett, I. Richardson and Wake. John Chapman and Sarann Valentine.

Declarations of Interest

Item 2b – Progress Report on 2011/12 Workplan : Activities for Young People and Tackling Youth Disorder

Councillors Thompson, H. Trueman and Williams declared personal interests as Local Authority representatives of the Oxclose and District Young People's Project.

Item 2d – Financial Statements and Proposals

Councillor Thompson declared a personal interest in the Northumbria Police Community Chest application as he was in receipt of a pension from the Authority.

Councillor Thompson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the Community Chest application for Rickleton Primary School as he was a governor of the school.

Councillor Snowden declared a personal interest in the SIB application for the Washington Young Carer's Integration Project as a Member of the Gentoo Washington Board who had approved £5,000 match funding.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 2nd June, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 2nd June, 2011 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Community Action in Washington: Progress Report on 2011/12 Work Plan: Employment Priority

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update and progress report on activities and proposals for further work to deliver against the Employment Priority as part of the current year's (2011-12) Work Plan (as detailed in Annex 1 to the report).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karon Purvis, Area Officer presented the report and the Chairman then introduced Faye Gething, Lead Personal Adviser who gave an update on the progress of the NEET Support and Co-ordination project.

Ms. Gething advised that the findings showed there was no advancement for young people, with 58% wishing to obtain work rather than continue with personal development programmes. There was a lack of opportunities for further advancement with a real need for employers to get on board. Transport issues and a reduction in staff in such services as Connexions for example, also had not helped the situation.

There would be more demand on the services next year due to the rise in University fees and there was Government proposals on apprenticeships but it was not known how many would be made available in this region.

The research looked at the unemployment register at the lowest ebb with 9.9% based in Washington, which was the lowest in the City, but this figure was rising with more unemployed on the register now, than previous years.

Ms. Gething advised that the recommendations were for increased partnership working with people and other organisations to deliver better outcomes. The need for extra provision through apprenticeships with a “mix and match” style to suit the client group. There must be a substantial amount of employer contact with the ability to gain qualifications with progression routes. Start dates needed to be flexible and staggered for when people were available and to accommodate different backgrounds.

Councillor Kelly commented on the need to look at the 19 year olds as well as the 16-18 year olds as under Government proposals there was a big concern that we were going to have a large number of young people unemployed.

Councillor Kelly also felt that updates were needed and the Committee should receive regular reports on the issue.

Councillor Miller commented that the report identified prevalent issues with a lack of employers, which if we had on board, could deliver a whole lot more. Washington also suffered from dreadful transport issues and Councillor Miller felt he had not seen enough focus on these areas in the recommendations.

Councillor Miller also commented that the Area Committee funding available was not a great amount so felt the focus should remain with the 16-18 year old age group.

Ms. Gething advised that the Employability Skills Programme had supported apprenticeships with 78% of participants being retained after the programme and there were also college apprenticeships, so there were programmes already up and running that if given extra support could take on extra numbers. Connexions had also worked extremely hard in keeping youngsters engaged.

Councillor Williams commented that it was hard to draw a line on what age ranges should be considered and raised concerns the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee have had with some of the providers involved, who do not appear to have the best interests of the children in mind.

Councillor Kelly commented that he had issues with the college aspects, as they received a fee for every child enrolled and it appeared it was more about quantity than quality. Councillor Kelly stated that he wanted to see more development with businesses for greater chances of employment and to eradicate the perception that youths could only gain employment at the age of 18, as many consulted had stated they wanted real jobs rather than continue with personal development programmes and such like.

Councillor Kelly also commented that he realised the budgets were tight but he would like to see the scope expanded to include 19 year olds.

Ms. Gething advised that including the 19 year old group in the review could be problematic as some children could be missed depending on their birth dates.

Ms. Purvis wished to draw the Committee’s attention to the Call for Projects on page 54 of the report and requested Members input for project outcomes.

Councillor Kelly requested that a decision be made over the age groups and if it would be expanded to include 19 year olds.

Councillor Snowdon commented that she felt the year group for 19's should be included.

Councillor Miller commented that the research was carried out on the 16-18 age groups and colleagues needed to consider the finances available and the concerns of spreading them too thin. Councillor Miller felt the Committee should focus on the 16-18 year groups, which was the basis of the report.

The Chairman agreed with Councillor Miller's comments and put the decision to the Committee for a vote, with 6 in favour of keeping the age range at 16-18 year olds and 4 against, it was resolved that the study look at 16-18 year olds as per the report.

Employer's Demand Survey

The Chairman then introduced Karen Alexander, Employment and Training Manager to update the Committee on the Employer's Demand Survey.

Ms. Alexander advised that from the responses, employers had been very willing to talk and had received a lot of support and co-operation. The results were being analysed with a first draft expected by 15th August.

Ms. Alexander also informed of the request for consideration of funding for a Business Breakfast for employers on the 10th August, were they could present their findings, start to address the issues and tackle the missing skills in the workforce, putting something in place to improve things and move forward.

Councillor H. Trueman enquired as to how the businesses had been contacted.

Ms. Alexander advised that experts in market research had been used, who had a sophisticated research programme and database which looked at the different sectors and size of businesses, etc.

Councillor H. Trueman commented that upon a recent visit to a particular specialised company in Washington he was made aware that they had not been contacted in relation to opportunities for apprenticeships and that whilst the company was not massive, they were skilled workers.

In response to the Chairman's query, Ms. Alexander advised that the 150 employers who contributed to the survey had been invited to the Business Breakfast.

The Chairman requested that the company Councillor H. Trueman referred to, be invited to the Business Breakfast. Ms. Alexander advised that she would double check to make sure they hadn't already been invited.

Councillor Williams enquired if there were Retail and Manufacturing companies on the list of employers contacted.

Ms. Alexander advised that there was a wide cross section of representatives from Sunderland.

Councillor Kelly commented that the Committee had provided an amount of money for the survey to be carried out with Washington businesses and queried if the 150 invited to the Business Breakfast were from Sunderland. Ms. Alexander advised that the 150 companies were Washington based.

Councillor Miller commented that he had been sceptical of this at first but was pleased with the progress so far and would be attending the Business Breakfast.

Ms. Alexander commented that the level of interest had been most encouraging.

In response to Councillor Williams' enquiry, Ms. Alexander advised that she had been reassured of a good cross sector representation of companies by size and geographic distribution but she was not sure if a list of companies could be provided beforehand and she would have to check the terms of the contract.

Councillor Thompson advised that there was already a Business Breakfast Club in operation which had to hold their meetings outside of Washington and suggested that they also be invited.

In response to the Chairman's enquiry, Ms. Alexander confirmed that the Federation of Small Businesses had been included in the phone survey.

Councillor Miller commented that a list of employers due to attend the Business Breakfast should be provided beforehand.

Ms. Alexander advised that the experts had requested that they send out the invites themselves, so it may not be possible to provide a list.

Councillor Miller commented that this could be a problem and if they could not provide a list of the companies attending, then the Committee should receive its £10,000 funding back.

Neil Revely, Area Lead Executive advised that unless it was a contractual issue, he was sure something could be provided and it may be that one or two companies had wished to remain anonymous.

Councillor Kelly commented that they had commissioned a survey and needed to see where the companies were based and it was unacceptable to pay £10,000 and not be able to receive this information.

Andrea Seymour, Solicitor advised that she would be happy to look into the terms of the contract.

Update on Washington Managed Workspace

Councillor Kelly requested that a more in-depth update be provided on this as there was an issue with where the workspace was to be located.

The Chairman agreed that a greater update was needed.

Councillor Miller commented that the preferred location was Crowther Industrial Estate which as far as he was aware, was still earmarked for use and he felt that Officers needed to notify Members on the situation.

The Chairman informed of a recent event where developers appeared confident of a residential change of use for the area.

Ms. Purvis advised that she would speak to Officers on providing more information.

Councillor Williams commented that it did seem to be at odds with the Committees plans and needed clarification either at the next Area Committee or a briefing note outside of the Committee cycle.

2. RESOLVED that Members:-

- (i) note the report, presented on behalf of the Employment Task and Finish Group;
- (ii) note the recommendations from the NEET Co-ordination report attached as Annex 2;
- (iii) approve an allocation of up to £100,000 for the Commissioning of activity through the Call for Project Protocol to support NEET's in Washington as presented in paragraph 3.1.3; and
- (iv) considered the proposed Project Brief attached as Annex 3 and agreed project outcomes to be included in that brief.

Community Action in Washington: Progress Report on 2011/12 Work Plan: Activities for Young People and Tackling Youth Disorder

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update and progress report on activities and proposals for further work to deliver against the priority of tackling youth disorder through activities for young people as part of the current year's (2011/12) Work Plan (as detailed in Annex 1 to the report).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Purvis requested Members input on the Project Outcomes detailed on page 57 of the agenda.

Councillor Miller commented that he felt there was a need for a lead agent on this project as there was only a small amount of money available.

Operation Choice

Councillor Williams referred to the Youth Bus and informed the Committee that as a governor of Lambton Primary School, upon investigation, the school had not seen the bus in over a year. Councillor Williams advised that she had taken this up with Inspector Barrett and suggested those involved with other schools check as it was important all schools get the opportunity to access the bus.

3. RESOLVED that Members:-

- (i) note the report, presented on behalf of the Young People's Task and Finish Group;
- (ii) agreed £10,000 of the Children's Services budget be used to deliver a Summer Holiday Activity Programme by Oxclose and District Young People's project;
- (iii) agreed £6,000 of the Children's Services budget be used by Oxclose and District Young People's project to deliver Friday Night Drop In Sessions;
- (iv) agreed £11,000 SIB be allocated to activities for young people, ensuring provision of 8-12 year olds is included;
- (v) approved the commissioning of activity through the Call for Project Protocol as presented in paragraph 3.1.3 for Activities for Young People; and
- (vi) considered the proposed Project Brief for Activities for Young People, attached as Annex 4, and agreed project outcomes to be included in that brief.

Community Action in Washington: Progress Report on 2011/12 Work Plan

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update of the progress against agreed actions in the current year's (2011/12) Work Plan (Annex 1).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Attractive Neighbourhood

Brian Hodgkinson, Washington Area Response Manager advised of the quick turnaround in Member requests with only five still outstanding from the 165 received.

The Customer Service helpline had received calls on issues of graffiti, dog fouling and littering but these had reduced in number. Complaints had been received in relation to Gentoo and Officers were working in partnership with them to address those.

Officers were addressing ongoing issues to identify land ownership particularly at Persimmon Homes developments.

Mr. Hodgkinson advised that there were no major problems of anti-social behaviour with only a handful of issues reported.

In terms of enforcement, three Officers were attending team walks and issuing spot fines, fixed notices for fly tipping and dog fouling, etc. The five Ward Team Leaders were doing inspections which Members were welcome to attend if they wished to get in touch.

Mr. Hodgkinson informed the Committee that Officers were also working in partnership with Gentoo on a project in Lambton to identify ownership of land in conjunction with Highways to combat an area of neglect. Investigations were also being made into involving the Probation Service to get a free service of help.

The Team had provided additional support after the events that had taken place in Washington, including providing additional waste bins and such like.

Mr. Hodgkinson advised of positive feedback received on the Northumbria in Bloom competition but the results would not be made available until September.

The Chairman referred to the ownership of land problems with Persimmon and felt that the issue may need to be escalated to the Leader for consideration.

Councillor Williams commented that she also had experienced issues with identifying ownership of land and responsibility.

The Chairman commented that it may be a situation to involve Sharon Hodgson MP also.

Councillor H. Trueman wished to congratulate Mr. Hodgkinson on the fantastic job he was doing.

Councillor Williams also wished to comment on the first class service that had been provided, through the responses received by Mr. Hodgkinson.

VCS Update

Jacqui Reeves, Area VCS Network Representative advised on their recent meeting and that the sector was keen to be involved with the priorities for the NEET project and felt it could add value.

Collaborative work was ongoing with the Health Champions project and they would see if they could work together more in other areas.

Ms. Reeves advised that it was hoped to share the key priorities to identify gaps and produce a model to collaborate on providing targeted support in the area of mental health. They were looking at ideas such as apprenticeships to support employers, training packages and support to enable people to stay in employment once it was gained.

Councillor Kelly agreed that a number of NEET's may have issues below the surface, such as mental health issues. These could contribute to their unemployment and he believed the VCS should be involved in the project and a separate project may be needed to consider how they could become involved with the employment and Business Breakfast Club.

Councillor Miller advised that as Chairman of the VCS Network meeting, he felt it had been most proactive with a lot of ground being covered.

4. RESOLVED that the report and the updates for the Work Plan (attached as Annex 1) be noted.

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

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to request the Committee's consideration of proposals for the allocation of the Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB) and Community Chest to support initiatives that would benefit the area.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that Members:-

- (i) note the financial statement set out in Section 2.1 of the report;
- (ii) approve £6,500 as a contribution from the 2011/12 SIB budget for the Oxclose Church Hall project;
- (iii) approve £15,000 as a contribution from the 2011/12 SIB budget for the Young Carer's Integration project;
- (iv) approve £1,500 as a contribution from the 2011/12 SIB budget for the Washington Business Breakfast project;
- (v) approve £2,000 as a contribution from the 2011/12 SIB budget for the Washington NEETs Support project;
- (vi) approve £3,000 as a contribution from the 2011/12 SIB budget for the Houghton Feast project; and
- (vii) approve all 16 proposals for support from the 2011/12 Community Chest as detailed in Annex 2 of the report.

Influencing Practice, Policy and Strategy – Information, Advice and Guidance Services

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) and Officers of the Business, Improvement and Advice Services Team provided a presentation, updating the Committee on the Information, Advice and Guidance review into ensuring a standard quality of service across the Council and to seek Members views and feedback.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Liz St. Louis, Head of Customer Service and Development presented the report advising that there had been a big programme of consultation held at the Washington Leisure Centre and workshops with the VCS, with the early findings showing that customers appreciated being able to contact the Authority via telephone and face to face. They would also like to be able to utilise the internet and a programme of work was being started to help customers familiarise themselves with the service. As not all customers had access to the internet, investigations were being made with the VCS on providing access throughout community based venues.

A workplan was being developed to make the services as accessible as possible so that they could encourage more independence of the service users whilst responding to their needs.

Councillor H. Trueman queried if we were reaching the right people and as we had a massive ICT department, we should be utilising their expertise for events and such like.

Ms. St. Louis advised that they were working with Communications on how they could best promote events, etc by utilising social media such as twitter and facebook.

The Chairman commented that the benefits of social media sites such as facebook were that you could receive instantaneous and honest feedback on events.

Councillor Kelly commented that the Council website needed modernising as it was difficult to navigate through and the Authority may not be getting the best possible exposure through the newspapers as the Sunderland Echo was mainly used to publicise yet there was a 50-50 split in the area for people who would rather read the Chronicle.

Councillor Kelly also felt there was a need to feed in more with how the public wanted to access services and commented that the new Customer Service Centre in Fawcett Street was first class.

The Committee was informed that work had started to work on the website to try and simplify the navigation and include Frequently Asked Questions with more straightforward instructions and advice.

The Chairman commented that if the website was kept simple it would be better for everyone's use.

Councillor Miller raised concerns that a large proportion of people did not have access to a computer and that there was no strategy on how to reach them.

Ms. St. Louis advised that a face to face service would remain as it was extremely important to the Authority to reach every demographic and they were consulting with under-privileged groups on how the services could be improved for them and it was recognised there was a need for choice, to suit everyone.

In response to Councillor Williams' request, Ms. St. Louis advised that they would follow the plain English guidelines when publishing any instructions and such like.

The Chairman agreed with Councillor Miller's concerns and commented that all options needed to be addressed but it was vital that those without access to computers were also catered for.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Empty Property Action Plan

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek Members comments and feedback on the Empty Property Action Plan 2011-12 (as attached in Annex 2 of the report).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing presented the report and advised that the Empty Property Action Plan had been developed as the issue had been identified in all areas.

Empty properties could be a blight to an area and attract anti-social behaviour so they were looking at how to tackle the issue in a structured way.

Mr. Caddick advised that they had people working at a local level without spending Council funds to get those properties back into use. The Empty Properties Team were working across the City in each area, sharing intelligence.

Mr. Caddick also advised that the Team contained an Empty Property Officer, Anti-Social Behaviour Officer and a Technical Officer.

Mr. Caddick informed the Committee on information relating to the New Homes Bonus and how they were looking to use this in conjunction with Gentoo.

In response to the Chairman's query, Mr. Caddick advised that the live date was 1st September and they would have the expert personnel in place before then and would provide Ms. Purvis with a list of contacts.

7. RESOLVED that Members:-

- (i) noted the information regarding New Homes Bonus; and
- (ii) considered the action plan for the Washington area with comment/suggestions to be sent through the appropriate consultation channels.

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

(Signed) B. SCAPLEHORN,
Chairman.