

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 10TH NOVEMBER, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Anderson, G. Miller, Mordey, Rolph, Walker, S. Watson, Wilson and Wood.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Mr. Tony Quigley, Team Manager Birmingham City Council Trading Standards who was attending the meeting in relation to the Committee's Policy Development and Review into illegal money lending. Members and Officers introduced themselves to Mr. Quigley and Mr. Richard Reading, Principal Trading Standards Officer, Sunderland City Council.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Oliver and Stewart.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 13th October, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13th October, 2011 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

(i) Reference from Cabinet – 5th October, 2011 – Revenue Budget Second Review 2011/2012

Parking Charges at the Council Multi-Storey Car Park at Sunnyside

Ms. Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Resources advised that Officers had managed to address the situation. Managing Agents had been reminded of the car parking arrangements included in the Development Agreement. They had instructed tenants in the area of the arrangements put in place and these were now being complied with. Ms. Tognarelli added that any income from the car park should now be at a legitimate level. Car Parking Services would continue to manage the situation.

Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

Policy Development and Reviews 2011/12: Progress on Reviews

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an update on the progress in relation to the two policy reviews being undertaken by the Management Scrutiny Committee into self regulation and illegal money lending.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and advised that the notes of the workshop into Self Regulation which took place on 31st October, 2011 would be submitted to the next meeting of the Management Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman then invited Mr. Tony Quigley, Team Manager Birmingham City Council Trading Standards to address the Committee with regards to the policy review being undertaken on illegal money lending.

Mr. Quigley proceeded to provide a presentation to the Management Scrutiny Committee on the work the Illegal Money Lending Team does and the success rate in terms of stopping illegal money lenders operating in England, Scotland and Wales. The presentation provided details of the practices of illegal money lenders, included details of past cases and the impact on communities. Mr. Quigley advised of the following key statistics for the Birmingham Illegal Money Lending Team up to January 2011:-

- over 1,700 illegal lenders had been identified,
- over 500 illegal money lenders (loan sharks) had been arrested,
- over £37 million of illegal debts had been written off (money victims would have paid back to illegal lenders if the team had not acted),
- over 182 prosecutions had been brought resulting in prison sentences totalling over 107 years and one indefinite sentence,
- over 16,000 victims of loan sharks had been helped including the most hard to reach individuals, and
- over 600 victims had been referred to alternate (legal) sources of financial support.

Mr Quigley informed the Committee of the 'U' Choose Initiative which had been undertaken in Middlesbrough where the community had decided how the proceeds of illegal money lending seized in that area should be used for the benefit of the local community as a whole. He advised that the intention was that this would be rolled out across other Local Authorities. Mr. Quigley also informed the Committee of other ways in which the proceeds of crime had been used which included the production of banners to inform communities of where they can get help from the Illegal Money Lending Team and holding community fun days where help and advice was also available.

Mr. Quigley referred to the official launch of the Illegal Money Lending Team in Sunderland which had been held earlier in the week on 8th November, 2011 and

informed the Committee that a Stop Loan Sharks banner was going to be put up on one of the shops in Sunderland City Centre to promote the work of the Team. Mr. Quigley informed Members of the Sunderland Mosaic which would assist the Team in terms of where to target support to neighbourhoods. He advised that leaflets and business cards to promote the work of the Team had also been produced and a supply could be made available to Members of the Council if they so wished.

Members of the Committee welcomed the presentation and commented that they had found it very informative.

In response to Councillor Anderson, Mr. Quigley advised that the maximum sentence for illegal money lending was two years. However, once a loan shark was under investigation the Team would collect any evidence they could find of associated criminal activity such as money laundering, which carried a sentence of fourteen years, of other offences committed such as counterfeiting, possession of drugs, supply of drugs, anything related to how they collect their debts such as blackmail, harassment, possession of firearms etc. and that they would use this wherever possible in order to try to ensure that the sentence was increased. Mr. Quigley added that in terms of the success rate in taking people to Court, that the Team was 100% successful as they only took those cases where they were sure of getting a conviction. He went on to say that if this meant putting a particular case 'on the back burner' in order to gather the evidence required, then this is what they would do, whilst in the meantime, trying to disrupt the particular loan shark's activity.

Mr. Quigley confirmed in response to a question from Councillor G. Miller that the Team were really 'hot' on trend analysis and by using the mosaic were able to use this intelligence to identify the likely victims in a particular area. He advised that a common trait of loan sharks was to target single mothers and seek payment through sexual favours.

Councillor Mordey advised that he had attended the official launch of the Illegal Money Lending Team on 8th November in Sunderland which had been very successful. He welcomed the suggestion that leaflets and business cards be made available to Members in order to promote the work of the Team, adding that he thought Members would be pleased to support anything to remove Illegal Money Lenders from communities and particularly at this time of the year.

Councillor Wood enquired how Members would be kept in touch with what was happening in the City in terms of the work of the Illegal Money Lending Team.

Mr. Quigley advised that regional reports would be produced which would include what was happening in Sunderland and that this together with regular liaison with the Council's Trading Standards Officers would ensure that the Council was aware of what was happening in the City.

Mr. Reading, Principal Trading Standards Officer, Sunderland City Council added that an action plan was being developed with a number of interested parties and there was constant communications activity with Denise Meek the Liaison Officer assigned to the Council.

In response to Ms. Jessica May, Partnership Manager for Sunderland Partnership, Mr. Quigley advised that training could be provided through Ms. Meek to the Street Pastor service so that they were aware of the issues, what triggers to look for and could assist in supporting victims of illegal money lending.

Councillor Rolph advised of the initiatives used to promote awareness of the support available to victims of Domestic Violence and of the publicity materials produced. She stated that items such as memory sticks and lip gloss had been issued to victims that provided details of where to get help, advice and support and had been shown to work well. She suggested that this might be something the Illegal Money Lending Team might find useful to promote awareness of the help it can provide and to spread its message.

Mr. Quigley thanked Councillor Rolph for the suggestions, commenting that the idea of the lip gloss was one which he would look to take forward. He added that the Team used various methods of promoting the work it did including dressing up in shark suits, supplying banners and the suits to 'piggyback' on any community events already planned in order to reach victims of illegal money lending and provide advice and support.

Councillor Rolph suggested that the Area Committees might also provide a good forum in which to raise awareness of the work of the Team particularly in the run up to Christmas.

Members having thanked, Mr. Quigley for his attendance; it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the information contained in the report, the presentation and brought out during the discussion, be noted.

LSP Annual Review

The Partnership Manager for Sunderland Partnership submitted a report (copy circulated) advising the Committee of her intention to attend the meeting and to provide a presentation to inform the Committee of the changes which are occurring in relation to the Sunderland Partnership.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Jessica May, Partnership Manager for Sunderland Partnership gave a presentation to the Committee providing an overview of national policy regarding the future of Local Strategic Partnerships, the emerging role of the Sunderland Partnership, the refreshed objectives and remit for the future, together with the proposed Partnership structure and future relationship with Scrutiny.

Ms. May advised that discussions were being carried out with the Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements concerning how the Partnership could develop and extend its role with regards to the Council's Area Committees and make a proper contribution.

Ms. May advised that it was hoped that the Partnership would be appointing a Chair in the not too distant future following the departure of Canon Stephen Taylor.

Members of the Committee commented that it was important that:-

- the refreshed Sunderland Partnership provided added value,
- Scrutiny whilst engaging with the Sunderland Partnership and seeking to have a greater understanding of the Partnership's role, was able to maintain its independence so as to be able to scrutinise the work of the Sunderland Partnership appropriately, and
- the structure and membership of the Sunderland Partnership were transparent and the agenda papers and minutes of the meetings were available and accessible for anyone to view.

Ms. May confirmed that the Sunderland Partnership website provided details of the structure, vision, agenda and minutes of the Partnership meetings. In response to the comment that not all members of the Partnership engaged with the Scrutiny process, Ms. May stated that she would raise this with the Partners on the Committee's behalf.

Ms. Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Resources commented that the Council would be seeking to ensure that there was a more equal sharing of resources and that the new Partnership Boards engaged with the Council's three year financial planning process and Responsive Local Services.

The Chairman thanked Ms. May for her attendance and presentation and wished the Partnership well with the ongoing changes.

3. RESOLVED that the content and the ongoing changes at the Sunderland Partnership detailed within the presentation and brought out during the discussion be noted.

Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for information the variations to the Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2011/12 and providing the opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2011/12.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

4. RESOLVED that the variations to the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes for 2011-12 and to the Management Scrutiny Committee's own work programme be noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st November, 2011 – 28th February, 2012

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items in the Executive's Forward Plan for the period

1st November, 2011 – 28th February, 2012 which relate to the Management Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the Executive's Forward Plan for the above period be received and noted.

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

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.