

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the RAICH CARTER SPORTS CENTRE on TUESDAY, 17th JANUARY, 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor S. Watson in the Chair

Councillors Errington, Howe, Kay, Maddison, McClennan, Porthouse and Smiles

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors T. Foster and Rolph

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 13th December, 2011

Ms. Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer, referred to page 5 of the minutes and advised that the next meeting of the Housing Developer's Forum was to be held on Wednesday, 25th January, 2012 at 1:00pm at St Thomas Street and informed Members that there would be the opportunity for a Member to attend with the Chairman. Any Member interested should contact either the Chairman or Ms. Lancaster directly for arrangements to be made.

Councillor McClennan issued her thanks to Mr. Caddick for having responded to her queries as raised at the last meeting, and it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th December, 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Porthouse declared a personal interest in Item 4 – Reducing the Barriers to Accessing Sport and Physical Activity as a member of the Council's Wellness Centres.

Councillor McClennan declared a personal interest in Item 6 – Community Development Annual Report as a member of the Sunderland VCS network.

Councillor Howe declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Enabling Independence Delivery Strategy – Long Term Housing Solutions with Care and Support.

Building a Sustainable and Lasting Legacy in Sport and Physical Activity Policy Review 2011/12 : Reducing the Barriers to Accessing Sport and Physical Activity

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided information to Members in relation to the barriers identified by residents of the city in accessing sport and physical activity provision.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer, briefly presented the report introducing Ms. Victoria French, Assistant Head of Community Services, Mr. Bill Leach of Pennywell CA and Mr. Gavin McGhin of ABC Boxing Club to the Committee who were in attendance to give Members the opportunity to have discussions with providers about barriers to participation in sport and physical activity and ways in which to overcome them.

Councillor Howe commended Officers for the comprehensive report stating that he felt the services were taking the right route in tackling any issues or problems that were identified as barriers.

Ms. French advised that the report only contained a snapshot of examples of projects that were being undertaken at any one time and advised that it was a moving programme of continuous work with clubs and providers to remove the barriers where possible.

Mr. Leach and Mr. McGhin gave the Committee an overview of the programmes they currently ran and were aiming to develop for the future, advising that funding streams, such as the SIB grant that had been received from the West Sunderland Area Committee to help in supporting the school holiday provision was invaluable in ensuring that new provisions were continuingly introduced and supported.

In response to a query from Councillor Porthouse around the involvement of local schools, Ms. French recalled that representatives from schools had attended the last meeting to advise of the engagement they had with local communities and in providing sport and physical activities and commented that they were now working more with schools than they had in the past around the opportunities available to provide activities outside of the usual school day.

With regards to the example of the football training being provided at St Robert's which Councillor Porthouse had referred to, Ms. French advised that this was delivered by the SAFC Football Foundation and therefore the school would liaise with this organisation directly rather than through the Council.

Councillor Porthouse went on to ask if a school approached the Council wanting help in providing certain activities were the service capable to do this and Ms. French advised that yes, if the service were approached by a school wanting to engage with certain providers or offer specific activities Officers would be able to signpost them to the most relevant clubs and groups.

Councillor McClennan referred to the wear and tear of equipment used by the groups and asked the two providers how they coped with finding the capital funding to replace it as and when needed. Mr. Leach informed Members that they would apply for funding through other streams available to them such as Sport England, although the situation was becoming worse. He explained that as the Chairman of the Regional Technical Committee he would get to apply for as many of the available funding streams that were on offer.

Mr. McGhin advised that they had been lucky enough to support the success of two previous Olympians through their gyms and funding had been accessed through Northumbria Police to provide new bags and equipment. He explained that the club had held fund raising dinner events in the past but that these were not being as widely attended as they once had been with this years only hosting eighteen tables compared to sixty in previous years.

Councillor Watson asked if there was a specific person within the club responsible for identifying and applying for funding and Mr. McGhin advised that this was part of his role. He explained that the club had been set up as a charity to allow more access to funding but that they were no always successful with bids. In response to a further question from Councillor Watson around needing help in completing funding applications, Mr. McGhin advised that he worked with VCAS and professionals within the family as he had found from experience that having better knowledge of funding and being able to complete forms using the right terminology helped.

With regards to the upcoming Olympics, Members were keen to ensure that any Olympian hopeful's profiles were raised in the city. It was felt that we needed to capitalise as a city where maybe we had not before with the success of the local boxer Tony Jeffries. Ms. French advised that she was aware of six individuals they were hopeful would be part of the Great Britain squad and it was intended to showcase them in a pamphlet issued by the Council to allow residents of the city to be able to follow them in their preparation and attendance at the games.

Having considered the report and thanked all Officers and representatives for their attendance, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the content of the information provided within the report and by the representatives from Sunderland City Council, Barnes Boxing Club and Pennywell Community Centre around the provision of sport and physical activity and overcoming barriers to participation be received and noted.

Cultural Strategy

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which invited Members to discuss the current Cultural Strategy and agree the way forward.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, presented the report advising that the current Cultural Strategy had been launched by the Council in 2003 having

been based on an extensive consultation that had taken place across the city using the theme 'Culture – what's yours?', whereby two key themes had emerged:-

- Identity, pride and positioning; and
- Access, aspiration and equality.

Members were now being consulted to decide whether they felt the cultural strategy needed or updating or refreshing.

Councillor McClennan raised concerns that the definition of culture within the report appeared to be very narrow and relating to the services and facilities provided by the Council and not more around identities and backgrounds of communities and asked how relevant the strategy would now be given the cultural change in Sunderland over the last ten years.

Councillor Watson asked what a review of the strategy would consist of and how long it may take and was advised by Ms. Hall that if it was agreed by the Committee that a review was necessary then she would develop what the 'light touch' review may look like and consider and bring back the proposal to the Committee to consider how it could be carried out. This was the very initial stages to see if a review should be initiated and if so the workings of one would be developed further. Ms. Hall advised that if Members felt a review was not needed that they would continue to deliver services as set out in the service plan with the Committee having an overview to feed their views into as and when necessary.

In response to a further question from Councillor Watson regarding funding to undertake a review, Ms. Hall advised that it would be carried out within the constraints of the services current budget with minimal costs, using existing forums and networks Officers had in place.

Councillor Porthouse commented that he was unclear as to what would be gained by carrying out a review of the strategy, as culture could mean completely different things to different people. Ms. Hall advised that the strategy was about having a vision for developing culture as a whole within the city and to identify what the aims of residents and communities were through the consultation process. She commented that it was of benefit to cultural services to best indicate how they could support the wellbeing of the city and individuals who lived, worked and visited in Sunderland.

Councillor Kay also asked how achievements would be measured and was advised that within the main strategy each of the key aims and objectives had targets to reach, but reiterated that these were obviously produced almost ten years ago when the strategy was first published so may not be as relevant as they once were.

Councillor Wakefield stated that as a starting point the Committee at least needed the definition of culture as it had already been stated that the word could mean many different things to different people and had to have developed over the ten years. Councillor McClennan also queried how actively involved Members and communities had been in the original strategy and raised concerns over how relevant any information from then may be in today's society.

Ms. Hall agreed to take on board the Committee's comments and come back to the next meeting of the Committee with proposals of how to undertake the review, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the information provided within the report be received and noted and that Members comments on the next steps / way forward be considered and agreed, with a report being submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Community Development Annual Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update to the Committee in relation to the Council's Community Development Service and work with the City's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) over 2011/2012.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Graham Burt, Strategy Development Manager, presented the report advising that Community Development had a clear and lasting impact on every aspect of Sunderland life and informed Members of updates to service provision, volunteering and the Area VCS Networks.

Councillor Errington referred to paragraph 10.8 of the report and the pilot workshop that had been recently carried out with the Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group and the East VCS network and asked which Committee the feedback from the workshop would be submitted to. Mr. Burt advised that in the first instance, the responsibility lay with the PCT as they had requested to meet with their network. He was unsure which Committee it would feed directly into but felt it would probably be the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Errington also referred to the Sport, Leisure and Community Development Structure that had been included as appendix 3 to the report and asked if a copy of this with the relevant Officers names included could be circulated to Members, to which Mr. Burt agreed.

Councillor Porthouse referred to paragraph 10.11 of the report and the review of Area VCS Networks and asked what the review would be looking at in particular, as he felt the network for the West Sunderland area covered too many wards of the city and there was no migration between groups on either side of the A690. Mr. Burt advised that they were looking at reviewing the procedure around representation on the networks and how best to have an area represented, for example, were three organisations in one area the right number to involve or too many, and looking at whether there was a need to change any representatives. He advised that processes had been in place for around two years and it was important to ensure that they were still fit for purpose with the VCS networks.

Councillor Watson commented that she suffered a similar issue between the areas of Pennywell and South Hylton and they had been awarded funding jointly and it had been interesting to see how they had begun to work together successfully.

Mr. Burt advised that the Community Development Team often took the role of devil's advocate to get organisations to work together and adopt new ways of approaching issues, whilst also being careful to ensure that they were not being overstretched.

Councillor Kay commented that he was under no doubt that this year could be one of the most difficult for the sector and it was important how the Council worked with volunteer groups in supporting communities and noted that the report showed clearly where the pressures were. He went on to say that many of the funding streams previously available to voluntary sector groups were no longer available or ringfenced for other organisations that may be part of a bigger consortium and it was important that the Council could give effective support and advice when needed.

Mr. Burt informed Members that the points raised by Councillor Kay were poignant around the pressures organisations were either facing, or could be in the future. He explained that some were partners who delivered Council functions and were engaging with Officers but advised that beyond that there was a wider network of organisations who the Council had little to do with and they needed to understand what was being provided across the board but not necessarily take the lead.

Councillor McClennan asked how confident Officers were that the reduced number of Officers in the team could deliver on all the identified priorities and Ms. French advised that the merging of the two teams into a smaller Community Development Team should help the Council in getting better value for money and with joined up working offer them a wider reach over VCS groups and organisations. She advised that the review of the network was to ensure they were not overloading the groups and by having continuous discussions through the network it would help build relationships to the best they could be.

Mr. Burt advised that there may be bigger issues for the VCS groups to face in the future and part of the function of the Community Development Team would be to ensure that Officers were involved with the organisations to understand what the sector is, what they provided for the City and how best to deal with any issues they had. Mr. Caddick, Head of Housing commented that the way the team were set up now would help provide a more focussed, joined up approach and as the team settled in this should hopefully give Members confidence.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for his report, and it was :-

4. RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted.

Enabling Independence Delivery Strategy – Long Term Housing Solution with Care and Support

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an annual update on progress relating to the delivery of priorities associated with the Enabling Independence Strategy ('The Strategy').

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, presented the report advising that the Council were engaged in an ambitious project to deliver supported accommodation to meet the needs of the city's current and future communities to meet the needs of vulnerable people who choose to live in the city including older people, people with a learning disability or with mental health and those with long term conditions including physical disability.

Councillor Watson referred to the proposed Fordfield Road development that was to start January, 2012 and Mr. Caddick advised that the demolition works were in order and it was expected to start in the next six weeks, although he would let Members know directly when works began. He advised that as it was a large site it would be undertaken in two phases and with it being in the very early stages allocations would not be being made yet. He advised Members that he would keep them informed of start dates and expected completion dates.

In response to a query from Councillor Errington around the proposed scheme at Doxford Park, Mr. Caddick advised that Gentoo would be carrying out consultation prior to the development but at present they were confirming funding and no designs or plans for the site had been developed yet. He informed Members that Gentoo had been told categorically that there was a need to involve local Councillors and had been assured this would be done as part of their development plan, giving them indicative timescales, etc.

Councillor Porthouse asked if any of the developments would be of mixed use, for example older people sharing a site with people with learning disabilities and Mr. Caddick advised that it would depend on each individual's circumstances and associated care needs. With regards the large development at Fordfield Road he informed the Committee that it could have separate wings allocated to residents with particular needs, who may then share communal facilities.

Councillor Porthouse referred to the four people from outside of the city who had moved into the scheme at Cherry Tree Gardens, Houghton and was advised that these could be individuals who had moved away from the city and wished to return. He explained that they had the same rights to allocations as any individual who was living in the city but could provide Members with more detail on the particular cases if it would help them.

Councillor Kaye commented that they had discussed a number of schemes at the meeting which he had not been aware of and asked if it may be worthwhile to arrange a visit to them to give Members a better idea. The Chairman advised that they had visited schemes in the past and Mr. Caddick confirmed that visits could be arranged at any time and suggested it may be beneficial for the Committee to hold a future meeting at one of the scheme.

In relation to owner occupiers taking up accommodation in the schemes, Mr. Caddick advised that there had been on instance, whereby, Gentoo had given a small licence to a resident to allow them to move in with a view of them selling their private property in the near future. He explained that due to the current economic environment and issues around house prices and the property market, it was normal for each case to be looked at individually and on its own merit.

Having answered Members questions and the Officer having been thanked for his report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the information within the report be received and noted and Members views on the progress and key outcomes outlined be considered.

Work Programme 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out the work programme for the Committee's work during the 2011-12 Council year.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Sarah Abernethy, Scrutiny and Area Support Officer, presented the report advising that any requests for future reports that had been raised at this meeting would be added to the Work Programme at the appropriate future meeting.

Ms. Lancaster advised that there had been a request to consult Members on the Equality Scheme and with the Committee's approval an informal meeting would be arranged to discuss it in further detail as there was not time to present the report to a Committee meeting before it was report to Cabinet.

Ms. Lancaster also advised that there had been an extraordinary meeting of the Committee scheduled for 6th March to agree the Draft Policy Review Final Report but that due to time constraints it would not be possible for this to go ahead at that time. She asked the Committee to consider having the meeting rescheduled for a later date or if they would prefer the report could be circulated to Members in advance of the April meeting with any comments to be forwarded to herself for inclusion.

Members having agreed to the second option for the draft policy review report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the information contained within the Work Programme be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st January, 2012 – 30th April, 2012

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, to 30th April, 2012 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

A copy of the recently published Forward Plan for 1st February, to 31st May. 2011 was circulated to the Committee for their consideration, and it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the contents of the Forward Plan be received and noted.

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

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.