

## Item 2

**At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 9<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2025 at 5.30pm.**

**Present: -**

Councillor Dodds in the Chair.

Councillors Bond, Burrell, Glancy, Hartnack, Hunter, Price, Usher and Walton.

**Also in attendance: -**

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer.

David Noon, Principal Democratic Services Officer.

Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy

Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members Support Co-ordinator.

**Councillor Claire Rowntree**

Prior to the start of the formal business, Councillor Dodds referred to the recent passing of the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Claire Rowntree, and Members stood for a minute's silence in memory of their late friend and colleague.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors F. Miller, Mullen, D Trueman and Williams.

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2025 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Cllr Bond in the list of apologies.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

Councillor Walton declared an interest in item 4, (Performance Management Update Quarter 1, 2025 / 26) as an employee of Education Partnership North East.

**Performance Management Update – Quarter 1 of 2025/26**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 1 of 2025/26.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy, took the Committee through the three key themes of Dynamic Smart City, Healthy Smart City and Vibrant Smart City of the Sunderland City Plan, highlighting commitments, key achievements and progress made for each key theme, as well as performance against the Plan's ambitions for the city and its people.

The Chair thanked Ms Poulter for her report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Councillor Glancy referred to the secondary school suspension rate of 49.4% detailed on page 18 of the agenda and asked if it would be possible to see the numerical figures as well as the percentage figure. She stated that it would be interesting to know if the figures included multiple suspensions for single pupils and also to see the corresponding figures in relation to persistent absences. It would also be helpful to have the regional and national figures in relation to these indicators.

Councillor Clancy then referred to the impact framework in relation to cared for children achieving grade 4-9 in English and Maths in Sunderland and noted that the corresponding figures for the North East and England were missing. Ms Poulter confirmed that she would circulate the regional and national figures to the Committee.

Councillor Bond stated that with regard to the report in general, it would be useful to see the actual figures in addition to the percentages. With regard to the annual absence figures for school and academies, Councillor Bond stated that it would also be useful to see the figures reflected against the numbers of pupils on roll.

Ms Poulter replied that she would look to provide the missing and additionally requested information and also provided the Committee with some context, potential reasons and mitigations in respect of the rates of absence and exclusion.

Ms Robinson advised that the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny committee received a report on 4th September 2025 in relation to suspensions and exclusions from schools which she would circulate to Members for their information. The Committee also received the TfC Meaningful Measures report at its July meeting which included a lot of the data requested.

Councillor Hunter expressed concern regarding the undiagnosed issues suffered by some children together with delays in the issuing of the final ECHP to pupils and the problems this caused in being admitted to the school which best suited the pupil's needs.

Councillor Burrell referred to the Apprenticeship Levy Spend and asked if the approximate £50,000 underspend would be lost if not spent? Ms Poulter replied that she believed that there was no provision that would allow the underspend to roll over, however she would check and report back.

Councillor Hartnack referred to the figures for Electively Home Educated Children which he believed were alarming given the graph showed an upward trajectory indicating that the figure was on its way to doubling in just over the course of a single year. He asked if the Council was doing anything to monitor the quality of the education being provided to electively home educated children, if indeed it had the ability to do?

Ms Poulter replied that the Children Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee had also discussed the issue of electively home educated children at a meeting towards the end of the last municipal year. She stated that the Director of Children's Services would say that unfortunately TfC had no statutory ability to judge the quality and outcomes of the education provided to children at home which remained purely a matter of parental responsibility.

Councillor Hartnack asked if it was worth raising a concern that councils were not legally able to monitor the quality of the education being provided to electively home educated children. Councillor Bond advised that he had raised the issue on a number of occasions at meetings of the Health and Wellbeing Board. Historically, Central Government lacked interest in the matter and previous attempts to reform the existing system had ultimately failed in the House of Lords. Mr Cummings advised that he would inform the Children Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee of members' concerns on the matter. Councillor Burrell advised the Committee that under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently going through Parliament, parents would no longer have an automatic right to home educate, if their child was subject to a child protection investigation or under a child protection plan, and in respect of all children, if a local authority deemed the education and/or home environment unsuitable, local authorities would have the power to intervene and require school attendance.

Councillor Price referred to the 39 confirmed new apprenticeship starts at the Council and asked if it was possible to receive the figures for apprenticeship starts at other organisations in the city such as Gentoo and also the types of apprenticeships offered and undertaken. Councillor Price referred to the data in general and suggested that it would also be useful for the Committee to see the figures for previous years for the purpose of comparison.

Councillor Hunter referred to the graph indicating the instances of access to public wifi and asked if there were any reasons (such as technical issues) for the drop off during January and February 2025? Ms Poulter replied that she would check and report back regarding any reasons identified for the fluctuations.

In response to enquiries from Councillor Hartnack, Ms Poulter clarified the status of the arrow indicators (i.e, a green arrow would always refer to a positive position and a red arrow would always be a negative trend) and provided the Committee with a definition of what constituted a 'green economy job'.

Councillor Bond referred to the figures for under 18 alcohol admissions and the prevalence of children in year 6 living with obesity as detailed on page 25 of the agenda and suggested that members understanding could benefit from the inclusion of regional and national comparisons.

Councillor Hunter referred to the graph relating to teenage pregnancy detailed on page 25 and stated that it looked like the line in relation to 2022/23 was missing. Ms Poulter advised that she would take the query away and try and investigate the reasons for the lag. In addition, Councillor Hunter asked if it would be possible to highlight in future reports if any particular indicators were new indicators.

Councillor Hartnack referred to the rate of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system (191), highlighted on page 29, and asked to receive details if this was high or low in comparison to the national average. Ms Poulter confirmed that she would feed the information back.

Councillor Price referred to the fact that 147 partners had signed up to the links for Life Charter and asked if he could receive information regarding the types of organisations concerned. He also referred to the graph showing the numbers of unique users of the links for life website and asked if some context could be provided as to whether they were good, bad or indifferent.

In response to enquiries from the Chair, Ms Poulter confirmed that the October spike in C Card enquiries shown in the graph on page 25 of the agenda, reflected the annual influx of new students into the city. The number of infants being breast fed was on the increase and was pleasingly above the national average. She also confirmed that the figure of 49.3 under 18 alcohol admissions per 100,000 was a decrease on the previous figure and the upward pointing green arrow indicated that this was a positive direction of travel.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Walton regarding whether Council interventions in respect of childhood obesity were having an impact, Ms Poulter advised that the current position was not where the Council would like it to be and that she would send details of the current types of interventions to Councillor Walton for his information.

Councillor Hartnack stated that if the figure of 42.3% in respect of the prevalence of children in Year 6 living with being overweight was correct, then 1 in 2 children in the city were classed as overweight. He found this hard to believe and asked for the source of the data. Ms Poulter advised that the figures in respect of obesity were centrally produced at the national level rather than being a locally sourced indicator.

Councillor Bond referred to the Impact Framework figures detailed on page 26 and commented that the indicator regarding Alcohol Specific Mortality in Sunderland was absolutely shocking.

Councillor Burrell referred to the graph on page 32 which detailed the 'average transaction value (ATV) and the average amount of revenue (ARPC) relating to the city centre as a leisure destination', and asked if there were any reasons for the fluctuations in the transactions indicated on the graph. Ms Poulter replied that she didn't have that information to hand but would investigate and report back.

With regard to the quarter one performance indicator regarding inclusive events delivered under the Community Cohesion Plan, Councillor Hunter noted that there was no arrow to indicate the direction of travel and asked if there was a reason for

this? Ms Poulter replied that because the Plan was new and the strategy underpinning it was not yet complete, there was not sufficient data available to indicate any long-term trends. Councillor Hunter added that it was good to see the positive performance in respect of the measure of residents who felt they belong.

The Chair referred to the graph on page 34 which indicated the number of Sunderland UK Facebook and Twitter followers and asked if Council also used other social media platforms such as Tik Tok or Instagram as a means to engage with the younger generation. Mrs Poulter replied that Facebook and Twitter (X) remained the Council's primary means of disseminating information, however it would use other platforms in a targeted way for specific campaigns. In response to a further enquiry from the Chair, Ms Poulter advised that the 2023/24 quarter 1 spike in Community Care Support awards reflected a larger than expected number of applications. The relatively flat line on the graph thereafter reflected the expected position.

Councillor Burrell referred to the indicators on page 36 and believed that the graphs relating to renewable energy generation, electricity, water and gas consumption would make more sense if presented as line graphs rather than bar charts.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Walton, Ms Poulter advised that she would circulate the formal definition of all the items comprising the 'Cleanliness' indicator over and above litter, graffiti and dog fouling and try to provide greater context around the indicator in future reports. The Chair added that it would be interesting to see the hot spot locations and whether the figures at these locations increased or decreased over time.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Bond, Ms Poulter confirmed that the graph detailing sickness absence rates showed that the average council worker, on average, missed 1 day a month through sickness. Councillor Hartnack referenced the Committee's recent task and finish group study into the Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce and asked if its recommendations were making a difference. Ms Poulter replied that the direction of travel was an improving one however progress was slow.

The Chair referred to the red arrow and the figure of 91.67% regarding the indicator for 'Health and Safety Incident Investigation' and asked if Ms Poulter could provide some context. Ms Poulter replied that the target was 100% and given there were very few cases it only took one case to stretch beyond the 15 days to significantly skew the figures.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Ms Poulter for her attendance, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the information provided within the report be received and noted and that the additional information requested by Committee Members be circulated following the meeting.

## **Annual Scrutiny Work Programme 2025/26**

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2025/26 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2025/2026.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer presented the report, updating Members on the current position regarding the Work Programmes of the Scrutiny Committees and the forthcoming items to be considered by the committee.

3. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes for 2025/26 and the variations to these work programmes be noted, together with the current scrutiny budget position.

## **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2025.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice, (that were within the purview of the Committee), they should contact Mr Cummings, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

4. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chair then closed the meeting, having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) T DODDS  
Chair