

At a meeting of the WEST SUNDERLAND AREA COMMITTEE held remotely on WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER, 2020 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Gibson in the Chair

Councillors, Atkinson, Blackett, Crosby, D. Dixon, Greener, Haswell, Mann, McDonough, Mullen, O'Brien, G. Smith, P. Smith, Tye, Waller, Watson and A. Wilson.

Also Present:-

Fiona Brown	Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, Sunderland City Council
Alan Duffy	Head of Operations, Gentoo
Joanne Laverick	VCS Network Representative, Youth Almighty
Bill Leach	VCS Network Representative, Pennywell Com. Centre
David Noon	Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council
Alison Patterson	Area Coordinator, Sunderland City Council
Helen Peverley	Area Arrangements Strategic Manager, Sunderland City Council
Gilly Stanley	Area Community Development Lead, Sunderland City Council

Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the protocols in respect of holding the meeting remotely.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors O'Brien and Wood and on behalf of Sam Rennison (Northumbria Police) and Kevin Burns (Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service).

Declarations of Interest

Item 4, West Area Budget Report – Holiday Hunger Projects

Councillors Tye and A. Wilson declared interests in the above matter as members of Youth Almighty and the Pallion Action Group respectively and withdrew from the meeting at the appropriate point on the agenda taking no part in any discussion or decision thereon.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 22nd September, 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

West Area Committee Delivery Plan 2020-2023

Councillor Watson, Chair of West Area Neighbourhoods and Community Board, presented the report (copy circulated) which:-

- i) Presented the West Area Committee Delivery Plan 2020-2023 and;
- ii) Provided an update of progress against the Area Priorities associated with the Delivery Plan.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman thanked Councillor Watson for her report and there being no questions or comments, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the progress and performance update with regard to West Area Committee Delivery Plan 2020/23 be noted, and
- ii) approval be given to the proposals for future delivery as contained within Annex 1 of the report.

Community Wealth Building Champions

The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods and Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised the Committee of the next steps, following Cabinet approval in March 2020 of the Sunderland Community Wealth Building Strategy, taking into consideration the additional action to be taken to continue to grow community wealth across the City's communities.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Helen Peverley, Area Arrangements Strategic Manager, presented the report and provided the Committee with a Powerpoint presentation which detailed the Council's journey in growing the proposals around Community Wealth including the reasoning behind the nomination of the Chairman as the Community Wealth Building Champion for the West Area.

Ms Peverley informed the Committee that the Council had been working with its key partners across the city to help ensure that the residents' 'pound' was kept within Sunderland. In the words of the Strategy, Community Wealth involved - "Developing assets, of all kinds (people and place), in such a way that the wealth stays local. Using local assets to make communities more vibrant. Aiming to help individuals, families and communities control their own economic destiny"

Ms Peverley highlighted the 7 Key Actions underpinning the Strategy with particular reference to 'Demonstrating our Commitment' and reiterated the work the Area Committee had already done and was continuing to do in this regard with examples including:-

i) the Area Committee Call for Projects – eg supporting local organisations and supporting residents to gain employment, skills, training and grow resilience and continuing to build specific community wealth requirements into future proposals,

ii) Supporting local traders – eg Christmas Hampers; Switch-on events seasonal activities

iii) Land and Asset Management – eg developing community assets as well as improving green spaces

iv) Working with partners to ensure they consider 'community wealth

The Chairman thanked Ms Peverley for her presentation and before inviting questions, read out the following comments which he had received from Cllr K. Wood via email and which she had asked to be minuted:-

“I support all the reports and want my views around Community Wealth Champions to be minuted. I have seen first-hand the pressure and the increased workload the pandemic has had on the voluntary sector. I am pleased that Sunderland City Council have recognised the hard work and dedication that the VCS have displayed and facilitated during this long and hard year. Any support given by Sunderland City Council is welcomed by myself and I am happy to support this going forward and more than welcome being involved in the development to achieve the vision for Community Wealth.”

“I would like to thank and commend Gilly Stanley for all the work she has done, particularly the adaptable approach she has shown and the flexibility in her work. I would also like to pass on my thanks to all the voluntary and community organisations who are working tirelessly to ensure our most vulnerable are taken care of and lastly I would like to thank Sandra Mitchell and Joan Reed Teams for all the support they have given this year.”

The Chairman then invited questions and comments from Members on Ms Peverley's presentation.

Councillor Haswell stated that he supported the broad proposals in the report and his Group had been happy to support the concept of Community Wealth when the matter had been reported to and agreed by full Council. He was therefore happy to support recommendation 4.1 of the report but had concerns about recommendation 4.2 (Agree to support the Area Committee Chair to deliver their Community Wealth Champion role on behalf of the residents of Sunderland, demonstrating the commitment of West Area Committee to support growth.)

This concern centred on the composition of the Community Wealth Steering Group. Councillor Haswell stated that his comments were nothing personal against the Chairman of the Area Committee who he believed was a great advocate for the West area, however he was worried that because the Group was composed entirely of members of the ruling Labour Group, there was the potential for a lack of Scrutiny and a failure to report findings back to the Council's Area Committees.

Councillor Haswell acknowledged that following similar concerns raised at the meeting of the East Sunderland Area Committee, the Deputy Leader had reached out to the Opposition Groups who as a result, had nominated Councillor Michael Dixon to sit as an opposition member on the Steering Group. This however was not reflected in the report before Members. He stated therefore, that he could not support recommendation 4.2 and asked that it was the subject of a named recorded vote.

Having been invited by the Chairman to respond, Ms Peverley confirmed that Councillor Michael Dixon had accepted the nomination and was now sitting as a member of the Steering Group. Ms Peverley and the Deputy Leader were due to meet with Councillor Dixon on 7th January to brief him on the Community Wealth Delivery Plan.

Councillor Haswell replied that he appreciated Ms Peverley's comments, however it had not been confirmed in writing, either in the report before Members or in any other documentation with the exception of the email exchanges between the Deputy Leader and the Leaderships of the Opposition Groups. Until it was formally 'codified' he believed it would remain as an "arrangement" which could easily be broken.

The Chairman gave Councillor Haswell a personal assurance that the discussions of the Steering Group would be fed back to the Area Committee Members.

Councillor Mann then spoke in support of the comments made by Councillor Haswell.

In reply, with regard to the concerns that nothing had been put down in writing, Ms Peverley advised that her confirmation of Councillor Dixon's position and the debate around the issue would be recorded in the minutes becoming the formal record of proceedings once those minutes were agreed by the Area Committee at its next meeting. This position was confirmed by the Governance Services Officer.

The Chairman then invited Members to continue to consider the report. Councillor Crosby informed the Committee of a conference she had attended where Professor Chambers of Sunderland University had spoken on the economic benefit to Sunderland of its student population and the measures that could be taken to ensure the City benefitted from their spending power. She suggested that Prof. Chambers could be helpful in informing the delivery of the Community Wealth Strategy moving forward.

Councillor McDonough spoke in support of the comments made by Councillor Haswell. In addition he described the report as being 'a bit woolley around the edges' and 'lacking in detail'. He also requested details of the costings involved in the delivery of the Strategy to ensure it could be shown that its costs would not out-weigh its benefits.

Councillor Atkinson spoke to 'echo some positivity' about the report. She accepted that it may be seen as woolley and as a concept appear rather high-brow, however, in reality it was something that was happening in Sunderland already. She asked the Committee to positively embrace the proposals as in helping to keep the 'Sunderland Pound' circulating within Sunderland they would be doing right by their residents.

Councillor Mann confirmed that she and her group shared Councillor Atkinson's positivity and had witnessed the numerous good projects developed in the West and the city as a whole. She supported the report in general but believed there were a number of eyes to be dotted and tees to be crossed.

Councillor Haswell briefly reiterated his position that he could not support recommendation 4.2 as it currently stood, despite the assurances given by Ms Peverley and the Chairman, because they were not reflected in the written report in front of Members.

In reply Ms Peverley informed the Committee that the position with regard to Councillor Dixon's appointment to the Steering Group had only been confirmed the previous Friday. This was after the statutory publication date for the agenda and therefore could not be reflected in the report which had already been published.

Councillor Tye stated that he was struggling to understand Councillor Haswell's position on the matter. He queried if Councillor Haswell was implying that he did not trust that the assurances given by Officers would be minuted and stuck to. He stated that normally if it was felt that something was missing from a report, an amended would be moved to include it, and consideration would then be given to the amended in the usual way.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Councillor Haswell clarified that he was just looking to split recommendations 4.1 and 4.2. He was more than happy to support recommendation 4.1 but was seeking a vote on recommendation 4.2 as he could not support it in the form it was written.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman put recommendation 4.1 to the Committee which was agreed by consensus.

The Chairman then put recommendation 4.2 to the Committee and a named vote was taken.

With 8 members voting in favour (namely Councillors Atkinson, D. Dixon, P. Gibson, P. Smith, Tye, Waller, Watson and A. Wilson), 8 members voting against (namely Councillors Blackett, Crosby, Greener, Haswell, Mann, McDonough, Mullen and G. Smith) and no abstentions, the Chairman exercised his casting vote in favour of the recommendation and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the contents of the report be noted, the work undertaken to support the growth of Community Wealth across Sunderland be acknowledged and the Committee continue to support the delivery of the Sunderland Community Wealth Strategy, and
- ii) the Committee support the Chairman to deliver his Community Wealth Champion role on behalf of the residents of Sunderland, demonstrating the commitment of West Area Committee to support growth.

Report of the West Area Voluntary and Community Sector Network

The Network submitted a progress report (copy circulated) which briefed members on issues pertinent to the Committee and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Consideration was given to the report presented by William Leach which highlighted the following VCS Network activity undertaken since its last report to the Committee:-

- i) The continued work undertaken by Pallion Action Group and Youth Almighty Project with the Council, CCG, Gentoo and volunteers to provide support for local residents in the West who were Clinically and Extremely Vulnerable in respect of shopping and prescriptions,
- ii) The receipt of presentations from Green Doctors and WEEE projects, both presentations were engaging and the network was provided with information on how to work together.
- iii) The operation of organisations from across the network throughout lockdown, often working with support bubbles of individuals or remotely, working within government guidelines to keep everyone safe by respecting social distancing and implementing rigorous hygiene procedures.
- iv) The support to deliver Christmas activities from the Sunderland City Council Winter Covid call for projects, to assist families and residents across the West

There being no questions or comments for Mr Leach, the Chairman thanked him for his report, and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Report of Gentoo

Alan Duffy, Head of Operations, Gentoo Group presented a report (copy circulated) which briefed the Committee on:-

- i) the award to Gentoo of the G1 governance rating by the Regulator for Social Housing, the highest governance rating that could be issued and which sat alongside the V2 viability rating that Gentoo continued to maintain.
- ii) the 6 month suspension on all non-urgent transfer requests together with the appeals process
- iii) the investment and renewals process with particular reference to the delivery of the first phase of the Chester Gate development to provide 118 new homes and also the current position with the Prestbury Road site.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

In response to enquiries from Councillor Mann, Mr Duffy confirmed that the development of the Chester Gate site had historically been subject to a number of delays since the time it was first cleared in the 1990s. The latest had obviously been Covid related however work had now reconvened on the site following the September Gentoo Board meeting. The anticipated sales launch before Christmas had been postponed because it was felt its impact would be minimised by the impending renewed lockdown. Mr Duffy also confirmed that it was intended that social housing provision would be included in the later phases of the development.

Councillor Mann congratulated Mr Duffy on Gentoo regaining its G1 rating and for the excellence of its consultation on the Prestbury Road development.

Councillor P. Smith referred to the comment in paragraph 3.2 of the report that during the suspension period, Gentoo would carry out a review of the Allocations policy, including consulting with key partners and customers on the policy. She asked if this included consultation with elected members. Mr Duffy confirmed that it did. Councillor Tye informed the meeting that the new Gentoo Chief Executive and his fellow Board members were absolutely committed to the importance of consultation with elected members and the need to work alongside local councillors to take them on the journey with them. Councillor Waller echoed the sentiments expressed by Councillor Tye.

Councillor Haswell asked was the appeals process easily understandable for people? How many of the 22 appeals were successful? Could Mr Duffy provide a breakdown of the banding of the waiting list, ie how many of the 8,000 on the list fell into bands 1, 2 or 3 and did the criteria for 'Urgent Need' include issues of overcrowding and mental health?

Mr Duffy outlined that everyone received a letter or an email explaining the suspension of the transfers and which gave them 3 weeks should they wish to appeal. This could be done via a letter, email or direct contact with their local housing office. With regard to the 22 appeals, the majority had been successful with the original decisions being overturned following the submission of additional supporting information by the appellant regarding their circumstances which they had previously failed to make Gentoo aware of. With regard to the banding, the freeze on transfers only applied to people in band 3 (the general need band) which largely covered transfer requests that were based on want rather than need. There was no freeze on transfer requests in respect of tenants based in bands 1 and 2. Both overcrowding and mental health were band 2 considerations.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mr Duffy for his report and it was :-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Report of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

A report of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) (copy circulated) was submitted which provided the Committee with an update on the Service's performance indicators for the period ending 25th November 2020 with particular reference to the L133 Incidents (deliberate fires) broken down by property type.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chair advised that in the absence of the presenting officer, the report was submitted for information only. If members had any questions on the report they should be emailed to Ms Stanley who would ensure that they received a reply in writing.

6. RESOLVED the report be received and noted

Report of Northumbria Police

A report of the Northumbria Police Service (copy circulated) was submitted which provided the Committee with an update on and key performance information in relation to the Sunderland West area for the period September to November 2020

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chair advised that in the absence of the presenting officer, the report (copy circulated) was submitted for information only. If members had any questions on the report they should be emailed to Ms Stanley who would ensure that they received a reply in writing.

Councillor Tye expressed concern about the standard of the Police report which he described as ‘thin’ and ‘lacking meat on the bone’ given the distance between the last attendance of the Police at the Committee’s meetings. He believed the West area was being treated as ‘the poor relations’ when compared to areas such as the North, especially as the West was one of the Council’s biggest areas with some of its biggest problems. He stated that he would have expected an attendance from the Inspector or one of the two Sergeants to expand on the information in the report.

Councillors Crosby, Mann, P. Smith, and Haswell spoke in support of the comments made by Councillor Tye who asked the Chairman to raise the Committee’s concerns with the relevant Chief Superintendent. The Chairman having agreed to do so, it was:-

7. RESOLVED the report be received and noted.

West Area Budget Report

The Assistant Director of Community Resilience submitted a report (copy circulated) in respect of the above matter.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Gilly Stanley Area Community Development Lead, presented the report highlighting the Committee’s financial statement, details of 13 projects approved under delegated powers for support from the 2020/21 Community Chest budget, together with details of proposals for the allocation of funds from the Neighbourhood Fund and the Neighbourhood Investment Capital Fund.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Area Committee’s funding statement as detailed in paragraphs 2.1 and 3.1 of the report be received and noted;

- (ii) approval be given to the granting of £6,000 from the Neighbourhood Fund to extend the Holiday Hunger project as detailed in paragraph 2.4 and Annex 1 of the report;
- (iii) approval be given to the alignment of £100,000 from the Neighbourhood Fund in respect of the Improve Access to ICT to reduce Social Isolation Programme Priority as detailed in paragraph 2.3 and Annex 1 of the report
- (iv) approval be given to the granting of £65,000 Neighbourhood Investment Capital funding and £87,000 Neighbourhood Funding – (Healthy Weight funding) to the Green Gyms project as detailed in paragraph 3.4 of the report;
- (v) the approval of the 13 Community Chest applications from the 2020/21 budget as detailed in Annex 2 of the report be noted.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) P. GIBSON,
Chairman.