

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 13TH OCTOBER 2022 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D.E. Snowden in the Chair

Councillors Bond, Curtis, Doyle, Edgeworth, Hartnack, Mason-Gage, Mullen, P. Smith, D. Snowden and Watson.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Mr Matthew Jackson, Principal Governance Services Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Ms Vicky Mullis, Research Manager, Ipsos

Ms Lucy Nicholson, Senior Communications Manager – People

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members Support Co-ordinator, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Mr Paul Wilson, Assistant Director of Finance

Mr Paul Dixon, Chief Accountant

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Butler and H. Trueman

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 26th September, 2022

Councillor P. Smith advised that page 4, paragraph 3 should refer to her knowing of two clinics which had not reopened and that this had led to people suffering falls, not that the falls clinic had not reopened.

Councillor Edgeworth advised that the final paragraph on page 4 should refer to the 'city centre' rather than the 'local area'.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 26th September, 2022 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above amendments.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 7 – Notice of Key Decisions

Councillor Doyle made an open declaration in respect of item number 220621/720 due to the involvement of his employer in relation to the matter on the notice regarding development at Nile and Villiers Streets Sunnyside.

Change in the Order of Business

At this juncture the Chair advised that Item 6 – Resident Survey 2021 – Results would be considered ahead of the budget items (items 4 and 5)

Resident Survey 2021 – Results

The Senior Communications Manager (People) submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a presentation which provided Members with an update on the results of the 2021 resident's survey.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Lucy Nicholson, Senior Communications Manager – People, and Vicky Mullis, Research Manager, Ipsos, joined the meeting via Teams to deliver the presentation.

Ms Mullis presented the headline figures from the survey. There had been 5800 addresses receive the survey between October and December 2021 and there had been 988 responses received. This was a 17 percent response rate which was comparable to other similar surveys. The responses had been adjusted to be representative of the population of the city.

Satisfaction levels had increased to 21 percent and residents had felt that the council was value for money and addressed residents concerns. Satisfaction in the local area had however reduced. There had been significant decreases in satisfaction around pavement and road maintenance and park maintenance while street cleansing and refuse collection services had seen an increase in satisfaction. Satisfaction in sport and leisure facilities had also decreased.

Tackling antisocial behaviour was an issue which needed to be addressed as there was only a 14 percent satisfaction rate.

Satisfaction in services and support for young people had decreased as had satisfaction around the building of affordable and better homes.

Feelings of safety in the city centre were mixed. During the day 71 percent felt safe however this dropped to 17 percent at night with women and families feeling most unsafe.

Opportunities for participation had reduced however this was in part due to Covid19. There had been a reduction in volunteering which was the same as the national situation. There had been an increase in civic pride however with 36 percent feeling that the city had a positive future. There had been an increase in social cohesion.

There was a perception that job opportunities did not exist in the city. 47 percent of respondents had stated that the thought that Sunderland was a city with fast and reliable internet access.

Time spent exercising was below the national average. 7 out of 10 respondents stated that they never cycled.

63 percent of respondents had agreed that it was easy to travel within the city using public transport.

Ms Nicholson then presented the next steps. Members briefings had been undertaken and there had also been information disseminated through social media, printed newsletters and on the Council's website.

The impacts of Covid19 and the ongoing economic uncertainty had been considered however it was important to ensure that it was not assumed that these were the reason for the results.

The fieldwork was now live for the 2022 survey; this was being done later than usual but the outcomes would be shared sooner than from the 2021 survey.

The Chair then welcomed questions from Members.

Councillor Hartnack referred to the small number of responses received and asked whether the responses could be considered statistically valid. Ms Mullis advised that it was a robust sample size and there was confidence in the sample size and information received.

Councillor Mullen commented that all of the questions were quantitative rather than there being any qualitative questions. This left the responses open to interpretation. The results showed more satisfaction than in 2018 however did not give any explanation; since then there had been major changes to the council including the appointment of a new Leader and changes to the political composition of the Council. He asked whether there could be changes in future to include open questions so that it could be identified why people provided the responses they gave. Ms Mullis advised that research could lead to more questions than it answered and prompted further research. Both types of question had their own value however it could be difficult to analyse the responses to qualitative questions. Ms Nicholson advised that there were open questions on the feelings of safety however the questions were designed to allow benchmarking of the responses and identification of trends.

Councillor Edgeworth expressed his concerns over the feelings of safety in the city centre; he queried what the national average was and also what was being done to rectify the issue. Ms Mullis advised that the LGA looked at local areas and that there had been issues around transport and also bad news stories in the media which had impacted on feelings of safety. It would be important to see if there was any difference in the next survey. Ms Nicholson advised that the matter had been picked up as a priority in the action plan and that there had been a range of concerns including police presence and transport which were a role for partner organisations to address.

Councillor Edgeworth then referred to the survey for 2022; the adverts had referred to ward names however these were not always reflective of the names of local areas so residents might not be aware of what area was being referred to; he queried whether this may affect the results. Ms Nicholson agreed to look at this, it was important to ensure that there was representation from all areas. There had been questions added to differentiate between the city centre and local areas. The covering letter referred to the city council so that respondents in the Hetton, Houghton and Washington area did not feel excluded.

Councillor P. Smith commented that she did not feel that such a small sample size was representative of the whole population and that perception played a part in people's responses. She had seen the survey and noted that it was 10 pages long and contained 68 questions, she was concerned that this was too long and people would feel that they did not have time to respond to this survey. Ms Mullis advised that the response rate was in line with other surveys and that it was a long survey as there was a lot of information needed to be captured. Phone surveys could be more positive however they could also lead to respondents being biased in their responses, paper surveys often generated more honest responses. Paper surveys were also more value for money as phone and face-to-face surveys were more expensive. Online surveys could exclude people as not everyone had access or was comfortable using the internet.

Councillor D. Snowdon agreed that the survey size seemed too small and queried whether it would have been possible to send a shorter survey to more residents. Could the survey have been broken down into smaller segments with respondents being asked to answer only part of the survey. He also queried who was responsible for deciding what questions were asked. Ms Nicholson advised that work was done with Ipsos to identify what questions to ask; this had been done in conjunction with looking at previous surveys and also with surveys done by other authorities. She agreed that it was a long survey and added that there were more questions that could have been asked. Ms Mullis added that the difficulty in sending shorter surveys was that there were links between how people responded to questions relating to different areas so there was a value in asking all questions to all respondents. Ms Nicholson then stated that the fieldwork was being done for the 2022 survey and that once the results for this survey had been received then potential changes for future surveys could be looked at. The trends between the surveys would be analysed and there could be changes to the trends if the methodology changed.

Councillor Curtis queried whether the survey could consider local areas as well as the city centre as there were shopping areas within the local areas. He also asked what the age range of respondents was. Ms Nicholson advised that the focus on the city centre was in addition to local areas and that locations of respondents was mapped so that feelings for local areas could be identified. Ms Mullis added that there had been responses from a spread of ages however older people were more likely to respond; this was why the responses were then adjusted to be more representative of the whole population.

Councillor Curtis then questioned doing the survey online, this could encourage younger people to respond as they preferred to use online services. Ms Mullis stated that this could be looked at and that there were surveys that were done online; the invite letter could include a link to an online version of the survey.

Councillor Mason-Gage referred to public transport and young people, the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee had spoken with young people and they were not happy with public transport provision; young people had strong opinions and needed to be listened to. The Chair questioned whether there was a young people's survey. Ms Mullis stated that whole survey could be done on transport and that there was more work to be done around young people and travel.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Reference from Cabinet – Second Revenue Budget Review 2022/23

The Assistant Director of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out, for the Committee's advice and consideration, the report to Cabinet on 13th October 2022 on the First Revenue Budget Review 2022/23.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Paul Wilson, accompanied by Mr Paul Dixon, presented the report.

The Committee acknowledged the information contained in the report and the various financial pressures and challenges that face the local authority. The Committee also noted the information on the General Fund Balances, Review of Existing Reserves and the Collection Fund.

The Committee had no further comment to make.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Reference from Cabinet – Budget Planning Framework and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2026/27

The Assistant Director of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the Committee's views on a report of the Assistant Director of Finance which was considered by Cabinet on 13th October 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Paul Wilson, accompanied by Mr Paul Dixon, presented the report.

Councillor Edgeworth referred to the 2.99percent council tax increase which was listed 'for planning purposes' and queried where the figure had come from. This increase would be a concern for residents. Mr Wilson advised that the 2.99 percent was the highest increase possible without holding a referendum and the government assumed that council tax would increase by that amount. It was too early to say what the actual increase would be.

Councillor P. Smith referred to the £500million fund for supporting discharge from hospitals into the community which was outlined in the government plans and Mr Wilson stated that this had been announced by the new Health Secretary and it was

not known yet how the funds would work through the system; the issue would not be easy to address.

Councillor Bond expressed concerns over the social care budget. The NHS was under pressure to free up beds and this pushed costs onto social care. there were staffing problems within social care and he did not see how providers would be able to attract staff due to the low wages and wage inflation within the job market. He did not see how the £3million allocated would be sufficient. Mr Wilson stated that there was funding coming through for social care but that timing was key. The national insurance levy would be used to fund social care. There was a need to look at how to ensure that social care was affordable and sustainable. The Chair added that the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee had looked at this at their meeting on 4th October and had set up a working group.

Councillor Doyle referred to the suggested need for staffing reductions within the council and asked whether this would impact on recruitment. Mr Wilson advised that there was no moratorium on recruitment and any posts that needed filling would be recruited to.

The Chair stated that The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee acknowledged the information contained in the report including the budget planning framework and updated capital strategy. The Committee also recognised the importance of budget consultation with key stakeholders and increased engagement with the public.

As in previous years there remained a number of uncertainties, pressures and challenges around the budget that the Committee will continue to monitor through future budget report.

The Committee had no further comment at this time.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the comments above be referred to Cabinet.

Task and Finish Working Group: Cabinet/Scrutiny Protocol

The task and finish working group submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented the findings of the working group which was established to develop a Cabinet/Scrutiny Protocol.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Mullen introduced the report and advised of the findings of the group and also the next steps.

Councillor Edgeworth referred to Cabinet Member attendance at Scrutiny Committees and asked that paragraph 8 on page 78 of the agenda be amended to say that Cabinet should inform Scrutiny of changes to policy or review.

Mr Cummings suggested that the paragraph be amended to read “Cabinet Members should look to enhance policy by seeking and considering the views of the relevant

Scrutiny Committee in relation to any major policy development or implementation". Councillor Edgeworth indicated that he was happy with this wording.

5. RESOLVED that the draft protocol be agreed subject to the inclusion of the above amendment and that the submission of the draft protocol to Cabinet be agreed.

Review of Scrutiny Arrangements in Sunderland – Action Plan

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with the action plan derived from the formal response and findings of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in relation to their independent review of scrutiny in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Robinson presented the report and advised of the current position and the action plan for moving forward as well as the next steps.

6. RESOLVED that:-

- a. the report be received and noted;
- b. the adoption of the Action Plan as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report be agreed; and
- c. the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee continue as the steering group for the development of the actions in terms of the scrutiny review.

Annual Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2022/23 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2022/23.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Full consideration having been given to the report it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes for 2022/23 and the variations to these work programmes be noted, together with the current scrutiny budget position.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 14th September 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

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

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

The Chair closed the meeting, thanking everyone for their attendance.

(Signed) D. E. SNOWDON,
Chairman.