

Item 2

At a meeting of the HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 6 JANUARY 2026 at 5:30pm.

Present:-

Councillor Usher in the Chair

Councillors Dagg, Donkin, Hunter, McDonough, Miller, F., Tobin and Walton.

Also in attendance:-

Nigel Cummings – Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Jane Hibberd – Senior Manager, Policy, Sunderland City Council

Sarah Norman – System Change Lead for Inclusion Health, Sunderland City Council

Andrea Hetherington - Director of Corporate Affairs and Legal, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Gillian Robinson - Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator, Sunderland City Council

Joanne Stewart - Principal Democratic Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Ryan Swiers – Deputy Director of Public Health and Wellbeing, Sunderland City Council

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Feeley, Heron and Reed.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 25 November, 2025

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 25 November, 2025 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Change in Order of Business

At this juncture, the Chairman agreed that Item 5 – Sunderland Alcohol Strategy and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Improvement Grant Update, be considered next on the agenda to allow Officers to leave the meeting having made their presentation.

Sunderland Alcohol Strategy and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Improvement Grant Update

The Executive Director of Public Health and Wellbeing submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an update on the Sunderland Alcohol

Strategy : Calling Time : It's Time to Rethink Drink, including the supporting action plan, and an update on the Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Improvement Grant.

(for copy report – see original minute)

Sarah Norman, System Change Lead for Inclusion Health, took Members through the report advising that the strategy had been developed via the Sunderland Drug and Alcohol Harm Reduction Partnership and had been launched in July, 2023 to coincide with Alcohol Awareness Week. In order to mitigate the impact of alcohol harms the following three objectives, with next steps, had been agreed:-

- Objective One : Prevention and Early Intervention;
- Objective Two : Providing Specialist Interventions to Promote a Quality Treatment and Recovery System; and
- Objective Three : Protecting Children, Young People and Families From Alcohol Related Harm.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Norman for their report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Councillor Hunter commented that younger generations were opting for zero alcohol drinks and asked if this was reflected in the figures; and Ms. Norman advised that they had seen a reduction in alcohol consumption by younger people and there was a real shift, with an increase in low and no alcohol sales. Members were informed that it had also been recorded in the health-related behaviour survey where more young people were indicating that they were choosing not to drink alcohol.

With relation to the Dry January initiative, Ms. Norman commented that they also promoted the Alcohol Is Toxic campaign which gave an emphasis for people to think about their consumption and drinking at any time of the year.

In a follow up comment, Councillor Hunter said that she would be interested to see how much of a difference the younger generation not drinking alcohol made on future alcohol related issues as they moved through the ages. Officers advised that there would be some data available that could be looked at from previous health surveys to give a comparison, although there would be some limitations as it would not be the same cohort of people.

In response to a further question from Councillor McDonough as to why Officers thought this may have happened, Members were informed that the picture was the same nationally; and there had been a culture change in the way alcohol consumption was viewed and there had been a lot of education and awareness focussed toward young people. Members were informed that they were also a lot stronger in terms of promoting licensing objectives when it came to protecting young people from alcohol related harm, such as them not being able to access licensed premises without valid I.D. which had not been the same historically.

With regards to services in the city, Councillor McDonough asked how many spaces there were for alcohol counselling, and was informed that there was no limit at this time and they were meeting current demand. The Officer advised that they would like to see demand increase and had capacity if it did, with additional funding that had helped to strengthen the pathways, ensuring they were getting more referrals

into the service. Ms. Norman also advised that early identification was important so they were not waiting for people to be in crisis with alcohol but could help when people started to think about how alcohol may impacting on their life and help in supporting them.

When asked how the service reached out to those people who may be quite far down the line, Ms. Norman commented that they had pathways to their service from a number of partner organisations such as criminal justice, hospitals and GP's, but it was also about promoting the service and visible recovery so advertising had been shown in the football ground, on the large screens around the city and bus stops, etc. She advised that they had an excellent recovery system in Sunderland and they had two lived experienced recovery organisations where they would use initiatives such as the coffee bike system, whereby they would speak with individuals regarding their experience helping to remove the stigma and how it may be daunting for them to access services.

Councillor Donkin referred to licensed premises and a property on Kayll Road that had an historic license transferred which no one had been aware of. He commented that the location of the premises was not deemed suitable and asked what control they had over premises that already had a license to sell alcohol and was informed that it could be difficult where license's were historically issued. Officers explained that they worked closely with the Licensing Team but Public Health was not a licensing objective so they were within the constraints of looking at the objectives and how they could support the other responsible authorities.

The Committee were informed that they were developing an alcohol matrix which would be shared with the other responsible authorities, looking at postcode level at the harm that was caused by alcohol in the area, which they hoped would give them more evidence when looking at mediation meetings with licensee's and Licensing Committees but they were still bound by the legislation.

In response to a question from Councillor Walton, in relation to objective 2 and whether there were evidential outcomes as it may be difficult to measure, Ms. Norman advised that they had seen a reduction in the alcohol mortality rate, a reduction in under 18 hospital admissions and a reduction in deaths in treatments, which were all very positive measures. The other aspect was that they had seen a huge increase in people accessing support for alcohol harms which showed they were breaking down the myth busting and stigma's around accessing those services. They were starting to see benefits in some of the outcomes but the actual data and the way it was recorded did mean it was usually delayed.

Councillor Tobin asked if there were still some sections of society in Sunderland where there was still a teen drinking culture and was informed that they understood there were still challenges in some areas but these were reducing. Members were advised that within the young people's drug and alcohol services they now had outreach workers, educational staff, family workers and training and resources so that people were aware of how to access the support they provided. Officers explained that it was difficult as they had to keep up with current trends and changes facing young people, but they felt that they did it well within Sunderland.

Mr. Swiers commented that if they wanted to get a cultural change then the most effective way was using local voices; people who had been through recovery and had a difficult journey, but an overall positive experience, so that it was not

healthcare professionals speaking to them all the time and someone much more relatable, who residents could connect with and understand their story. They were not able to quantify how valuable this was to young people and communities but it was becoming more of a feature as to how services worked in Sunderland.

Councillor Tobin referred to the poverty proofing and asked for examples, and Ms. Norman advised that she could share the particular report that was referred to but it was mainly around joining up services and ensuring they were accessible to all.

In response to a query from Councillor Miller regarding alcohol free pregnancies and if the figures for foetal alcohol syndrome had reduced, Ms. Norman advised that it was difficult to measure but she could get some statistics to her. She advised that at the next drug and alcohol harm reduction partnership meeting they were to be given a presentation on the work in Sunderland and she could extend an invitation to Councillor Miller.

With regards to a query from Councillor Dagg as to whether they had seen an increase in drug use at the expense of the alcohol figures or if it was a true decrease, Ms. Norman advised that they had not seen a change in that way, but they did see an overall change in the drug landscape of young people. There hadn't been any spikes in drug related incidents and they were actually seeing a change in culture rather than the substances being used.

Councillor Usher referred to the responsible retailers scheme and asked what the take up had been like and was informed that both the trading standards and licensing teams promoted it and the Challenge 25 initiative. Take up had been good so far but it would be the Licensing Team who could provide more detail in relation of figures.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Ms. Norman for their report and attendance, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- the information received within the report be received and noted; and
- the progress made against the Sunderland's Alcohol Strategy : Calling Time : It's Time to Rethink Drink and the Drug and Alcohol Harm Reduction Grant (DATRIG) be noted.

Sunderland Healthy City Plan Update

The Executive Director of Public Health and Wellbeing submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update on the Sunderland Healthy City Plan and Supporting 2026/37 Delivery Plan.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Jane Hibberd, Senior Manager, Policy, took Members through the report advising that the refreshed Plan which set out the vision and priorities for improving health and addressing inequalities in Sunderland had been agreed by the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) in July, 2025 and that Cabinet had endorsed the decision.

Members were advised that the refreshed Plan had twelve new priorities, presented under three themes of Healthy Place, Healthy Communities and Healthy People. The final 2026/27 Delivery Plan had been agreed in December, 2025 by the Board and the three delivery boards would continue to lead the delivery of the Plan and the reviewed Terms of Reference had been included as an appendix to the report for Members information,

Ms. Hibberd referred to the Aging Well Ambassadors programme, advising that there were now 288, who had been instrumental in being the conduit to engage with older people across the city, and if Members were interested in becoming one, they could let the Scrutiny Officer know who could advise her accordingly.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Hibberd for their report and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Walton referred to the voluntary sector involvement and membership to the Board and asked if there was potential for other VCS groups to be involved, Ms. Hibberd commented that there was always potential for groups to get involved but that the statutory partner that had been agreed on the Board was the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance.

Councillor Walton went on to add that the wider range of the voluntary sector that was involved than the better, and Ms. Hibberd commented that it was looking at where those groups resources were best placed so that their time was not taken up sitting at Board meetings and was being used most effectively. Mr. Swiers added that in some respects, the development sessions were almost more useful and invited a much broader spectrum of organisations to be involved. He added that they could take the comments back as a challenge to ensure that they were comfortable that there was enough breadth of representation from the sector on the Board.

In response to a query from Councillor McDonough regarding the legislation around including health in planning, Ms. Hibberd commented that it was national legislation but there was a consultation out at the moment, closing in March, and she was meeting with colleagues to ensure that the corporate response reflected health considerations in planning. Mr. Swiers commented that it was complex with the national planning policy framework, which they could try to influence, but they also had the local plan which could then be adapted locally.

Councillor McDonough referred to life expectancy and asked if this was an area that would be looked at as an important outcome and was advised that it probably wouldn't be in the delivery plan. Mr. Swiers qualified that it was an important indicator and they had a long term plan, with long term outcomes, which was the Healthy City Plan, but the delivery plan was in relation to 2026/27, and they didn't want long term outcomes in it that would be unlikely to be met within the year.

Councillor Hunter referred to the framework and the 44 high level indicators referred to at paragraph 4.1 of the report, which included the Council's priorities and the Marmot objectives and asked if this was duplication and Ms. Hibberd commented that the indicators were set out within the plan but then they also wanted to acknowledge that they were working towards the eight Marmot objectives, across the Council's twelve priorities. Mr. Swiers commented that if the 44 indicators were not as clear as they could be they could look into it further.

There being no further questions or comments the Chairman thanked Ms. Hibberd for their report and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the Committee:-
 - received and noted the Sunderland Healthy City Delivery Plan: 2026/27, including the supporting Integrated Impact Assessment which captured the intended impacts from delivering the refreshed plan; and
 - agreed to use the Healthy City Plan as a key element of planning the future Scrutiny Committee work programme.

Work Programme 2025/26

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2025/26 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minute)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and briefed the Committee on the current position regarding those items already scheduled on the work programme and those waiting to be programmed in on a suitable date.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

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 December 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.

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

There being no further items of business, the Chairman closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) J. USHER,
Chairman.