

24 June 2020

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOODS & CABINET MEMBER
COMMUNITIES AND CULTURE**

**SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES AND FINALISING NEIGHBOURHOOD INVESTMENT
PLANS**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Coalfield Area Committee of the next steps, following Cabinet Approval in March 2020 of the Article 10, area Neighbourhood Investment Plans, taking into consideration the additional priorities required to support Sunderland through to recovery post COVID-19.

2. Background – area Neighbourhood Investment Plans

- 2.1 The Council's constitution states that Area Committees will lead the delivery of local area plans (now known as Neighbourhood Investment Plans), which include the main priority themes for improvement of the area, following approval by the Cabinet. The five area Neighbourhood Investment Plans (North, Coalfield, East, West, Washington) are Article 10 plans.
- 2.2 The area Neighbourhood Investment Plans, were approved by Cabinet on 24th March 2020, and will now be directly aligned with the Area Committee priorities and delivery plans moving forward. The plans are also aligned to the City Plan. The plans focus on capital improvements and investments as well as service/neighbourhood solutions.
- 2.3 As previously agreed, residents, elected members and partners will be able to easily track progress via the Neighbourhood Investment Delivery Plan Activity Tracker, which will be available on the Council's website. This tracking facility will enable everyone to be aware of the action taken and developments / investments within their local neighbourhood.
- 2.4 Through the delivery of the Neighbourhood Investment Plans, alongside a bespoke and intensive communications campaign, Sunderland has a real opportunity to transform its Neighbourhoods, developing a joint pledge alongside communities and partners to regenerate and create more resilient communities and to influence and enable positive community behaviours. Area Committees will continue to be at the heart of this transformation journey.

3. COVID-19

- 3.1 As we commenced a new year, 2020, no-one could have anticipated the impact the Coronavirus (COVID-19) would have across the world. The COVID-19 pandemic was like no other ever experienced in our lifetime, however the British people came together as they always do during a crisis. On Monday 23rd March 2020, the Prime Minister declared to the nation that we must work together, stay at home to stay safe and protect the NHS.
- 3.2 From Tuesday 24th March onwards, our communities mobilised themselves like never before, looking out for each other and working together to support our most vulnerable.

- 3.3 Elected Members, alongside officers from across the Council, key partners and our Voluntary and Community Sector quickly and pragmatically established Area Community Hubs. These hubs coordinated supported to our residents, ringing them to check on their welfare if they were shielded, knocking on their door if we were unable to contact them by phone. A leaflet was posted through the letter box of every household, advising residents how to ask for help and also how to offer their help and support.
- 3.4 Area Committees were kept up to date on delivery of the Community Hubs via a weekly briefing (Annex 1). The weekly performance monitoring enabled the Community Resilience service to ensure it was supporting residents most in need and mobilising resources as required. The partnership working within the community hubs between the Area Arrangements Service, Customer Service Network, Voluntary and Community Sector Network, GP Alliance, Sunderland Care and Support, Together for Children, Sunderland CCG, Sunderland Public Health, Gentoo, Northumbria Police, Pharmacy network and Foodbanks and Welfare Rights, enabled each of the partners to maximise their resources efficiently for the benefit of all residents.
- 3.5 Staff from within the hubs communicated every day using telephone conferencing facilities as well as email and Microsoft Teams. Volunteers were coordinated through the Council's Volunteer Platform; residents initial contact was managed through the Customer Service Network and resources allocated throughout the city by the Area Arrangements Team alongside their Voluntary and Community Sector network partners.
- 3.6 The majority of the Voluntary and Community Sector were pragmatic and dynamic, mobilising themselves immediately to support communities. Area Committee may wish to consider how it will show its gratitude to the sector as the city moves forward into recovery. The sector was supported with small grants from the Council both as part of the Council response and also through some Community Chest grants. Through the regular dialogue with the sector we are aware that many organisations are under financial pressure for a range of reasons including loss of income from activities. The Council introduced a Local Support Scheme to offer funding to those organisations who were unable to access support through national arrangements and will continue to maintain contact with organisations to understand their future position.

4. Resident Engagement

- 4.1 Understanding the views of residents was vital to inform the development of the Neighbourhood Investment Plans. In September 2019, Sunderland Council launched the Let's Talk Sunderland Engagement Strategy, demonstrating its commitment to strengthen, consistently, engagement with residents – the strategy has been adopted for all resident engagement undertaken by the Council moving forward. It was first used for the resident engagement required to develop the Neighbourhood Investment Plans.
- 4.2 The brand 'Let's Talk Sunderland' was used to promote the Neighbourhood Investment Plan consultation as widely as possible across the city, offering the opportunity for all residents to get involved and share their views. This was the first-time resident engagement of this magnitude had been arranged by the Council. The consultation was undertaken alongside focused and themed consultation in relation to health, housing, young people, neighbourhood solutions, investment, crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 4.3 The detailed breakdown of the resident consultation undertaken at an area / neighbourhood level, supported by partners including the voluntary and community sector and elected members directly informed the Neighbourhood Investment Plans.

- 4.4 It is proposed to undertake further resident engagement, as we move through the recovery phase for COVID-19. This resident engagement will enable the Council and its partners to speak with residents about how they are feeling, where they believe the key priorities now fit and how we can move forward as a city, at a neighbourhood level, to re-build Sunderland's resilient communities for the future. It is important to note that this will not be a lengthy consultation and will be completed using information and contacts we already have in place and through social media.
- 4.5 Each of the area Community Hubs has developed a significant resident database through its community delivery work and it is therefore possible to utilise this database to make further contact with residents. The staff, across all partners, including the voluntary and community sector aim to speak to all residents they have supported, to ask them the following four questions:
- What do you believe is the number one priority for Sunderland to support its residents, post COVID-19?
 - How can we enable residents to feel safe and to improve their overall health and wellbeing?
 - Prior to the pandemic Sunderland had engaged with residents to establish investment plans, those plans included cleaning up neighbourhoods, improving health and wellbeing and strengthening the voluntary and community sector – do you believe these priorities are still important?
 - Would you like to support your neighbourhood by volunteering (or continuing to volunteer)?
- 4.6 These questions will be asked during community hub resident telephone calls and door knocks which are taking place daily, therefore additional resources will not be required. They will also be asked directly to those residents who participated in the previous engagement and provided their contact details. The consultation will also be available on line via social media using both the Council and Area Facebook Pages and the Council's website. The consultation will continue to be branded Let's Talk Sunderland.

5. Coalfield Neighbourhood Investment Plan - Themes

- 5.1 Following approval of the Neighbourhood Investment Plans by Cabinet on 24th March 2020, the main themes for the Coalfield Neighbourhood Investment Plan are as follows, as requested by the residents from the area:
- People are struggling due to Universal Credit – food banks etc..digital skills support
 - Need to raise aspirations for the future
 - Limited access to technology and need better wi-fi access for all
 - Need to raise standards in homes and create more affordable homes
 - Too many empty properties and rogue landlords are bringing neighbourhoods down
 - ASB an issue in some neighbourhoods
 - Parking issues and speeding traffic within neighbourhoods
 - People are concerned about litter and waste – effects on environment
 - Residents value their parks but think they could be improved and used more

- Love where you live campaign – led by children and young people
- Deep clean areas specifically within Neighbourhoods including removal of graffiti improving feelings of safety
- Support for Mental Health issues
- More activities and spaces for young people to be together and feel safe
- More local events and activities
- Neighbourhood Watch type schemes should be explored
- People want to get involved and help in neighbourhoods – make volunteering more accessible
- Protect our heritage and use heritage to bring communities together
- Support local community centres and voluntary organisations

5.2 Delivery of the priorities and tracking achievement of outcomes, informing residents and partners, over the coming years, will be crucial to maintain the momentum secured through the resident engagement undertaken to develop the plans.

5.3 However, it is vital that first we take the opportunity to engage with residents, as highlighted within item 4 within this report, to ensure these priorities are still fit for purpose moving forward and that the Neighbourhood Investment Plans strengthen communities and the sector and make our residents even more resilient.

6. Neighbourhood Investment – Detailed Delivery Plans and Activity Tracker

6.1 Following the additional resident consultation throughout May/June, Neighbourhood Investment Delivery Plans will be finalised. The delivery plans will include the following and will be presented at an extraordinary Area Committee in early July 2020:

- Investments (capital & revenue) to address issues raised through resident consultation
- Service solutions to address issues raised through resident consultation
- Large-scale investments including leisure and housing
- External funding opportunities
- Cultural services and activities
- Highways Infrastructure
- Environmental Services and low carbon commitments
- Community offer and capacity
- Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Neighbourhoods
- Jobs and skills growth
- Financial wellbeing

6.2 Residents clearly stated during the Let's Talk consultation that they wanted to know more about what the Council was doing within neighbourhoods on a day to day basis. The Neighbourhood Investment Delivery Plans must therefore be available to view via the Council's website. Residents will be able to track delivery of priorities as well as investment within the neighbourhoods from across Council services. This tracking facility will not only keep residents informed but also enable them to see where they could also get involved to support community efforts or projects.

7. Area Community Hubs

7.1 As identified earlier the Area Community Hubs have been hugely successful in delivering the response to COVID-19 and particularly in relation to working with partners

and more specifically working with VCS. We will ensure we capture the positives of this approach and strengthen this in our future delivery arrangements to enable the Neighbourhood Investment Plan Delivery Plans to be delivered efficiently for the benefit of all partners and residents.

- 7.2 The residents of Sunderland must also play their part – just as they have done over the last few months. The community spirit across our neighbourhoods, which kept the city going during the pandemic's darkest days, will strengthen the outcomes of the Neighbourhood Investment plans - residents must be able to support as well as inform delivery.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Note the contents of the report and acknowledge the work undertaken through the Area Community Hubs to support residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 8.2 Agree to support further resident consultation to finalise the detailed priorities for the Coalfield Neighbourhood Investment Delivery Plan, which will be presented to Community / Neighbourhood Boards prior to early July 2020 extraordinary Area Committee.