

**At a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE
SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 25th JUNE, 2015 at 5.30 p.m.**

Present:-

Councillor N. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Davison, D. Dixon, Fletcher, Howe, Scanlon, David Snowdon, Dianne Snowdon and Mr Williamson.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the first Scrutiny Committee of the municipal year. She reminded all present that it was a formal committee of the Council and as such everyone attending should dress accordingly. In addition all questions, comment and debate should be addressed through the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Ms A. Blakey.

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th April, 2015

Councillor Dianne Snowdon referred to page 4, paragraph 2 of the minutes and advised that it was she rather than Councillor David Snowdon who had asked the question in respect of hotel accommodation driving the evening economy. Subject to this amendment, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16th April, 2015 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of Interest made.

Youth Justice Plan 2013/14 to 2015/16 Annual Progress Update 2015/16

Sharon Clutton-Dowell, Interim Head of Youth Offending Service presented a report of the Head of Support and Community Living (copy circulated) which provided members with the opportunity to comment on the Youth Justice Plan Progress Update prior to its submission to Cabinet.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Clutton-Dowell briefed the Committee on the progress made by the Service in delivering against its following strategic priorities:-

- i) A preventative approach to reducing youth offending
- ii) Reducing reoffending
- iii) A family approach
- iv) A restorative justice approach
- v) Service evaluation

In particular member's attention was drawn to the success of the Liaison and Diversion Project which had been recognised nationally as an example of good practice. It was pleasing to note that the Partnership had managed to maintain its excellent performance indicators (PIs) which compared favourably at both regional and national level.

The Chairman stated that the Youth Offending Team had long been seen as an exemplar service and this report only served to enhance its reputation. The positive comments from Jenny Talbot of the Howard League for Penal Reform were very encouraging. The Chairman asked Ms Clutton-Dowell to take the Committee's congratulations back to her staff.

Councillor David Snowdon referred to the budget for 2014/15 of £3.5m and asked if there had been a surplus. Ms Clutton-Dowell replied that the service had accrued a small surplus of approximately £65,000 to £75,000. The budget over the last four years had almost halved however despite this the service had managed to maintain its performance levels. Councillor David Snowdon referred to the staffing structure detailed at appendix A of the report and noted that it was almost exclusively white British. Ms Clutton-Dowell confirmed this was the case and that staffing remained very static. The Chairman stated that this had also caught her eye. She referred to the statement in the report that 'Sunderland does not have a significantly diverse population in terms of ethnicity' and asked Ms Clutton-Dowell to clarify. Ms Clutton-Dowell advised that although Sunderland's population profile included various ethnic minorities, this was not reflected in the backgrounds of the young offenders known to the Service.

The Chairman referred to the slight increase in custodial cases and asked whether there had been a particular reason. Ms Clutton-Dowell advised that the Service always viewed the sentencing of a young person to a period of custody as a failure however in rare cases it was the only option given the nature of the offence committed. In the majority of cases the Service would look to work intensively with the young person within the community. The service had conducted a full review of all the cases over the last 12 months resulting in custodial sentences and had concluded that in all cases the sentences were appropriate.

Councillor Scanlan speaking in light of her experience as a Chair of Magistrates stated that in the case of first time offences of a sexual or violent nature, Magistrates were faced with two main sentencing options, one, a referral order or two, a period of custody. It was often frustrating that there was no middle course of action. Ms Clutton-Dowell having advised of alternatives in relation to lesser offences such as youth cautions, and youth rehabilitation orders, the Chairman advised that Councillor Scanlan had highlighted an extremely important point and suggested that the Committee framed this in its recommendations.

Councillor Dianne Snowdon referred to the Teen Triple P and asked what it was and how it worked. Ms Clutton-Dowell advised that Triple P stood for the Positive Parenting Programme. It was comprised of a five to six week course where the service worked with parents to preserve parental authority and helped them to set boundaries for their child.

Mr Williamson referred to the statistics presented on page 16 and suggested that they could be made more meaningful by the addition of comparative data and more easily understood if presented in the form of graphs or pie charts. Ms Clutton-Dowell advised that the rate of offending amongst Sunderland's Looked After Children (LACs) was at a figure of 13.5 to 14%. This compared regionally with figures of approximately 7 to 11%. In general LACs were over represented in the youth justice system. There were many reasons but in the main, if a young person became troublesome or violent within a traditional family setting, more often than not it was contained and dealt with by the parents. If a similar incident arose in a children's home the first action of the staff maybe to call the police. Mr Williamson replied that this only served to underline the Committee's previous concerns aired in earlier meetings around the propensity for LACs to become NEET. The Chairman stated that Mr Williamson was correct in that the Committee had discussed the problems facing LACs over a number of years and it was concerning that improvements were still required.

The Chairman having thanked Ms Clutton-Dowell for her report and congratulated her service on the national recognition it had received, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee recognised the sterling work that the Youth Offending Service undertakes and noted the Annual Progress Update. However, the Scrutiny Committee would also ask the Youth Offending Service to consider further options for local magistrates in dealing with first time serious offenders and request that any future Annual Progress Updates look to provide clearer visual representations of statistical information and comparative data through the use of pie charts, graphs and other suitable means.
- ii) the Youth Offending Service is invited back to a future meeting to discuss further approaches to the offending of Looked After Children.

Reference from Cabinet 24 June 2015 – Revenue Budget Outturn for 2014/15 and First Revenue review 2015/16

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out for advice and consideration of the Committee, an aspect of the report on the Revenue Budget Outturn 2014/2015 and the First Revenue Budget Review 2015/2016, namely requesting the Council to approve the transfer of funds.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karen Davison Deputy Head of Financial Resources presented the report drawing members attention to Appendix A which set out the relevant extract from the Cabinet

report, referring to the transfer of a £0.649m under spending on the revenue budget 2014/2015 to the Strategic Investment Reserve to support transitional arrangements arising from implementation of the savings programmes for 2015/16 and future years.

Consideration having been given to the report, the Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the proposal to transfer the underspend to the Strategic Investment Reserve and accordingly it was: -

3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee supported its recommendation to recommend the Council to approve the transfer of £0.649 million underspend from the 2014/2015 Revenue Budget to the Strategic Investment Reserve to support the transitional arrangements arising from the implementation of the savings programmes for 2015/16 and future years.

Reference from Cabinet – 24 June 2015 – Capital Programme Outturn 2014/15 and First Capital Review 2015/2016 (including Treasury Management)

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised the Committee of the approval by Cabinet of variations to the Capital Programme with an estimated variance of £250,000 or more which would also be reported to Council for information.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karen Davison, Deputy Head of Financial Resources referred Members to Appendix A which set out the relevant extract from the Cabinet report and which outlined the additional schemes regarding the Industrial Portfolio Improvement Works and the Seafront Regeneration with an estimated cost in excess of £250,000.

The Committee having confirmed that it was satisfied with the proposed variation to the capital programme it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Housing & Care21 Extracare Scheme

The Head of Integrated Commissioning submitted a report (copy circulated), which provided the Committee with an update on current issues raised by Members in relation to Housing and Care21 Extracare Schemes with a focus on Beckwith Mews, Bramble Hollow and Woodridge Gardens.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Graham King, Head of Integrated Commissioning presented the report, placing the issues in a historical context and advising of a meeting he had held with Housing and Care 21 earlier that day.

Members were advised that residents at Beckwith Mews, Bramble Hollow and Woodridge Gardens had become increasingly worried about the introduction of charges. This and the following issues were raised at a residents meeting held on the 12th May, 2015:-

Residents were unclear about the core charges and questioned why this information had not been provided or included on the Housing & Care21 website.

Four previous meetings had been held with residents and Housing & Care21 and the responses to questions raised had still not been addressed to residents' satisfaction.

Formal complaints had been made by some residents.

Constant turnover in staffing.

Intermittent provision of entertainment

Residents were stressed with the worry of the finances and not being able to sell their properties which they felt was as a consequence of the charges and number of schemes being built.

Housing & Care21 had a number of properties that were shared ownership. Residents had questioned why they were being charged 100% service charges when the apartment is shared ownership (50%).

The lease did not include details of charges that are still incurred upon death and continue until the point of resale. Some residents shared that the properties have remained unsold after a period of 15 months.

Mr King advised that the management of Housing and Care 21 had accepted all the qualitative issues and acknowledged that their communications had been poor. They had currently reverted to a no change position pending a review.

Mr King then addressed the following comments and questions raised by members.

- i) lack of communication with ward members
- ii) comparisons with the attitude and the managerial approach taken by Housing and Care 21 staff in Gateshead
- iii) the level of transparency in marketing and negotiating the sale of properties
- iv) reports that residents with mild dementia were being left to spend too much time on their own.

The Chairman stated that a number of serious concerns had been aired and thanked Councillor Doris Turner and former Councillor Florence Anderson for bringing them to the Committee's attention. She referred to Mr King's meeting with Housing and Care 21 and asked if he was satisfied with the approach they were now taking. Mr King replied that they were under no illusion as to how seriously the Council viewed the issues that had been raised. He was satisfied that they were now moving in the right direction. He stated that he would be happy to come back to the Committee at a future date to provide assurances for the Committee. The Chairman stated that she would also like to see representatives from Housing and Care 21 attend before the Committee and would be seeking legal clarification of the Committee's ability to call witnesses from outside the Council.

The Chairman having thanked Mr King for his attendance it was:-

5. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the Scrutiny Committee recognises the importance of good communication between a variety of interested parties in relation to Housing and Care21 and requests that consideration be given to improving communication with residents, families and relevant local ward councillors.
- ii) the Scrutiny Committee requests that the Head of Integrated Commissioning is invited back to a future meeting of the committee to reassure members of the processes and improvements from Housing and Care21 and that the invitation be extended to their appropriate representatives.

Composition of the Supporting Scrutiny Panels 2015/16

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) in respect of the above matter. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, briefed members on the commissioning model for Scrutiny in Sunderland and the revised membership of the Panels for 2015/16. The model would allow for a more focused, flexible and responsive function in challenging times. The Committee had a dedicated budget of £15,000 to allow it to commission work etc and the current budgetary position would be reported on a monthly basis.

The Chairman referred to the budget and advised that Lead Members should not hesitate to apply to use the budget to commission work if they felt it necessary.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. RESOLVED that:-

- i) The report be received and noted and;
- ii) The proposed membership of the informal Scrutiny Panels detailed in appendix 2 of the report be endorsed.

Annual Work Programme for 2015-16

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the determination of the annual Scrutiny work programme for 2015-16 including the selection of policy reviews to be undertaken by the Scrutiny Lead Members and their supporting Panels.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and drew Members' attention to the draft Work Programme as detailed in appendix 1 together with the shortlist of potential Policy Review topics as detailed in appendix 2. With regard to appendix 1, members were advised that the budgetary reports scheduled for consideration at the October meeting would now move back one month to November. Mr Cummings advised that the final policy review topics would be presented to the July meeting of the Committee incorporating the discussions aired at the Annual Scrutiny Debate and at the first round of Panel meetings.

The Chairman having thanked Mr Cummings for his report and advised that in addition to the Work Programme outlined in appendix 1, members would also be asked to partake in a fundamental review of the Scrutiny function. She was currently working with the Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements to scope the review and the outcome of this scoping work would be reported to the Lead Members in due course.

7. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Approval be given to the draft Annual Scrutiny Work Programme for 2015-16 and that emerging issues be incorporated as and when they arose throughout the year; and
- (ii) the list of suggestions for potential policy review topics be noted and that an updated the list be submitted to the Committee at its July meeting for approval following the first round of Panel meetings.
- (iii) The Scrutiny Committee receives regular updates on the progress of the work of the Lead Scrutiny Member and the supporting Panels through the Lead Scrutiny Member Update mechanism.

CfPS Annual Scrutiny Conference : Feedback

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated), which provided an overview of the recent Centre for Public Scrutiny Annual Conference held on 2nd June 2015.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karen Brown, Scrutiny Officer presented the report, briefing members on the keynote speeches delivered at the event. Members were also informed that a Panel Debate was undertaken on the subject of ‘the role of scrutiny in the face of austerity and devolution’ which included the Chair of Sunderland’s Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Norma Wright as a panel member.

Councillor Dianne Snowdon advised that she had attended the debate and had been proud to be in the audience on the day.

Ms Brown advised that if the CfPS published a transcript of the conference she would ensure that a copy was circulated to all members of the Committee.

The Chairman advised that she had been re-elected as Chair of the Combined Local Authority Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16. The Committee had been tasked to undertake a review of Transport connectivity within the Authority’s area.

In conclusion the Chairman advised that she hoped to arrange some training for the Scrutiny Lead Members via the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Chief Executive 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 28th May, 2015 together with the recently published notice covering the period from 23rd June, 2015 (copy tabled).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman asked that Members having any issues to raise or requiring further detail on any of the items included in the notice, contact Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, for initial assistance.

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

Councillor Scanlon having thanked Councillor David Snowdon for the work undertaken in his previous role as Lead Scrutiny Member for City Services and also having paid tribute to the 2014/15 former Lead Members, the Chair Closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions

(Signed) N. WRIGHT,
Chairman.