

**At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held REMOTELY on THURSDAY 11<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2021 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Hunt in the Chair

Councillors D. Dixon, Doyle, Jenkins, D. MacKnight, F. Miller, Mullen, O'Brien, P. Smith and D. Trueman.

Also in attendance:-

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

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Smart Cities, Corporate Services Directorate

Mrs Christine Tilley, Community Governance Services Team Leader, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Heron and Turner.

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

**Item 7 - Notice of Key Decisions**

Councillor Doyle made an open declaration in relation to item no. 201116/536 in relation to consultation work he had been doing with regards to the project.

## **Performance Management Update – Quarter 3 of 2020/21**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2020/21.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Smart Cities presented the report advising that the Performance report covered Quarter 3 of 2020/21 and was aligned to the Sunderland City Plan 2019 – 2030 and to the three key themes of the City Plan, Dynamic City, Healthy City and Vibrant City, as well as including the organisational health indicators.

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Smart Cities, Corporate Services Directorate took the Committee through the summary for the three key themes of Dynamic City, Healthy City and Vibrant City of the Sunderland City Plan, highlighting commitments, achievements and progress made for each key theme, as well as performance against each of the five aspirations for each theme and against the additional Council indicators for good organisational health, productive and innovative working, strong financial management and a Council ready for the future.

Councillor Doyle referred to the delivery of affordable homes and where it stated in the report that:-

“There have been 19 completed affordable homes in Quarter 3 of 2020/21, which is lower than expected but this has been affected due to the impact of the pandemic as well as wider funding changes with Homes England”.

Councillor Doyle asked whether Ms St Louis could explain to the Committee what the funding changes had been.

Ms St Louis stated that she did not have the above information to hand, but she could send the information out in writing.

Councillor D. Dixon referred to the information relating to Healthy City and commented that although the figures were generally improving in most of the areas that the healthy life expectancy had yet again gone down and asked whether Ms St Louis was able to provide an explanation for this and what the Council was doing to tackle it.

Ms St Louis advised that as they were national figures which were collated, they were quite old figures from 2016-2018 as at 2018/19 and it would take some time for the interventions to come through on this. The Council had appointed a new Public Health Executive Director, Gerry Taylor and there had been a significant amount of activity taking place. There was a Health Inequalities Strategy that had been adopted and a lot of work was being done within the Council and with partners across the City with a robust action plan which would start to be delivered from now into the next financial year.

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services added that one of the things the Executive Director of Public Health, Gerry Taylor had done as well as dealing with the immediacy of the response to the pandemic, was that at Cabinet on

23<sup>rd</sup> March there was an update on the Healthy City Plan which Members might want to look at when the papers were published the following week.

The Chairman commented that it was a valid point as all of the indicators seemed to be moving in the right direction, but yet the life expectancy was dropping and therefore was there something that wasn't being monitored or being addressed.

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Corporate Services Directorate advised that the Healthy City Plan had been considered at the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee a couple of meetings back and was something which the Committee was keeping on the radar and updates on progress would come through that Committee also.

Councillor P. Smith referred to the section on Cleaner and More Attractive City regarding litter and rubbish and commented that when looking at the report that there was a lot of things which were happening due to COVID, however this was not the case in relation to litter and rubbish and everyone could take it home.

Councillor Smith stated that she was tired of having to explain to people that it was down to people dropping litter. The Cleansing Department was doing a fantastic job trying to keep the Ski Slope site, for example, clear of rubbish but it was almost impossible and it was not acceptable that people did this. She was aware that the Council was taking enforcement action, issuing warning letters and there had been 9 completed prosecutions, however in her opinion the Council needed to come down harder on people as it was not improving in the city's streets, parks and open spaces.

Ms St Louis advised that there was a lot of work being done around enforcement as the figures showed and this had been increasing in every quarter she had been reporting in to the Scrutiny Committee, but there had also been quite a lot of work done on the social responsibility element to try to appeal to people to change habits and be responsible for the environment within which they lived and visited. It was an ongoing issue and one which the Council took very seriously and was trying its best to tackle.

Councillor O'Brien enquired whether the briefing provided to the Political Groups on the roll out of City Fibre could be provided to the Scrutiny Committee as he felt it would be beneficial as it was such an expansive infrastructure project for the City and should be promoted.

Councillor Mullen enquired with respect to the Literary Festival whether Ms St Louis was able to tell the Committee about the 18,000 engagements, how they were measured and how this figure was reached, for example whether people needed to sign up for a full event.

Ms St Louis stated that she did not have the above detail available to her, but she could get the information from the Team which ran the event and send that out to the Committee following the meeting.

The Chairman stated that the information would be very informative.

Councillor D. Dixon referred to the information on Vibrant City and commented that again most of the figures were showing improvement, which was excellent but, although it stated that crime recorded incidents was improving, residents' feelings of safety was declining. He asked whether this was because the incidents of violent crime in the city were increasing.

Ms St Louis advised that in the narrative it was explained that unfortunately some months' data was unavailable and that the survey to come up with that figure was actually suspended during the initial months of the pandemic. It was a much reduced sample size and so this needed to be revisited to ensure they were comparing comparative data.

The Chairman commented that she had been wondering whether the above was related to domestic violence and feeling safe in the home and whether an increase in domestic violence might have contributed to this.

Councillor Dixon advised that this was possible as at a recent meeting with the Police he had been advised that there had been an increase in the figures in violent crime.

Full consideration having been given to the report and there being no further questions of Ms St Louis, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the information provided on corporate performance in the report and the comments made be received and noted.

### **Compliments, Complaints and Feedback Quarter 3 October – December 2020**

The Assistant Director of Smart Cities submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with information regarding compliments, complaints and feedback received by the Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Smart Cities, Corporate Services Directorate briefed the Committee on the report advising that it presented an overview across the full range of complaints and feedback received by the Council during Quarter 3 of the financial year 2020/21, October – December 2020.

Ms St Louis referred the Committee to Part A, the Complaints and Compliments overview by type received which provided a departmental or company breakdown.

Ms St Louis referred Members to Part B which set out the procedures by which the Council and its companies operated.

Ms St Louis referred to Appendix 1 highlighting the 273 compliments received by the Council during Quarter 3 and pointed out that this was the highest number of compliments by far over the last two years for the same quarter. A synopsis was set out of the compliments which covered a whole range of services and expressed customers' appreciation.

Ms St Louis referred Members to Appendix 2 of the report which detailed the complaints dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman and Social Care Ombudsman and highlighted that there had been a total of 7 concluded and out of the 7 they had investigated 3 complaints and 1 to date had been upheld. The information about this complaint was contained within the body of the report.

Ms St Louis referred to Appendix 3 which covered corporate complaints and showed comparative data for the previous years. She advised that 560 stage 1 complaints were received in Quarter 3 and that she was pleased to report that this was the lowest number year to date. The directorate breakdown was detailed in the report with the vast majority in the busiest frontline delivery directorate which was Neighbourhoods with the vast majority relating to Environmental Services.

Ms St Louis highlighted that of the 411 Environmental Services complaints, 340 of those related to refuse but this was a very low percentage against the backdrop of 1.6m collections that took place in any quarter.

Ms St Louis stated that at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee a ward breakdown of refuse complaints had been requested and this was included in the report.

In terms of Stage two complaints, 5 had been concluded during Quarter 3 and 2 of those were upheld in part and 3 were not upheld. The Directorate breakdown was set out in the report along with a summary of the complaints which were partly upheld.

Ms St Louis referred to Appendix 4 which provided a summary of Adult Social Care complaints of which there were 32 received in Quarter 3. A breakdown was shown alongside the nature of the complaint. Out of the 32 complaints, 6 were upheld in full, 6 were upheld in part, 13 were not upheld, 6 weren't eligible and 1 was ongoing. A summary of the complaints which were upheld was provided within the body of the report.

Ms St Louis stated that at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee Members had asked if a sample of the complaints received could be included in the report and this had been included at Appendix 5 and showed a range of different areas.

Ms St Louis stated that Appendix 6 provided a summary of compliments and complaints for Sunderland Care and Support. There had been 68 compliments received in quarter 3 and a summary was provided in the report. There were 15 complaints during the period and details of the those were provided in the report. Ms St Louis pointed out that 10 of the complaints were not upheld, 2 were upheld in part and 3 were upheld in full.

The Chairman and Councillors D. Dixon and Mullen thanked Ms St Louis for adapting the report to include the information the Committee had requested at a previous meeting.

Councillor D. Dixon requested that future reports provided a table showing the number of complaints received for previous years to show the trend and assist with tracking whether the number was increasing or decreasing year on year and by

quarter in the same way as compliments were already shown in the report at Appendix 1.

Councillor Mullen commented that in his opinion Mr Graham Scanlon, Assistant Director of Housing Services had played a big part in why the bin collection service had improved. He referred to his own experiences where he had received speedy responses from Mr Scanlon to the enquiries he had raised and where he had been very rapid in dealing with problems and he thanked Mr Scanlon for this.

Councillor Mullen advised that he still received complaints about the inconsistency with which the issue of bags being left at the side of green bins was dealt with. He explained that sometimes they would be collected and at other times they would be left. This caused a bit of confusion for residents as to what Council policy was as some binmen would take them and others wouldn't, although he understood the latter was official policy. When they were left on the streets, Councillors subsequently had to report them as fly tipping or get them collected by other means because when residents returned they had blown down the street or had been torn open by birds etc. which meant that the rubbish was on the streets. Councillor Mullen asked that a more consistent policy on this was put into operation and that this was advertised to residents. Councillor Mullen stated that his strong preference on this would be that if it was only one or two bags, that it would be really helpful if binmen could pick them up.

Ms St Louis stated that she would take the point made by Councillor Mullen back to Mr Scanlon together with the complimentary feedback.

Full consideration having been given to the report and the Chairman having thanked Ms St Louis for her report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the information provided regarding compliments, complaints and feedback received by the Local Authority as detailed in the report and the comments made, be received and noted.

### **Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2020-21**

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the variations to the Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2020/21 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2020/21.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer referred the Committee to the report and the work programmes for the Scrutiny Committee and the three thematic Scrutiny Committees. He highlighted that paragraph 5 set out a small budget to deliver the agreed Scrutiny work programmes and assist with any further research required, however, to date there had been no expenditure due to the pandemic and lockdown which had been in place. Mr Cummings invited Members to submit any queries to him for a response.

In response to Councillor O'Brien, Mr Cummings confirmed that he would speak to Ms Liz St Louis regarding a briefing in respect of City Fibre and that this would be added to the Committee's work programme.

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

4. RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the variations to the Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2020/21 and to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's own work programme, be noted;
- (b) A briefing on City Fibre be added to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's Work Programme; and
- (c) the current scrutiny budget position for 2020/21, be noted.

### **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny and Members' 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 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2021.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, advised that if there was anything on which any Member wanted further information to let him know and he would be happy to take that forward on their behalf.

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

The Chairman closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance.

(Signed) P. HUNT,  
Chairman.