

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held REMOTELY on THURSDAY 3RD DECEMBER, 2020 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. MacKnight in the Chair

Councillors D. Dixon, Doyle, Heron, Hunt, Jenkins, F. Miller, Mullen, P. Smith, D. Trueman and Turner.

Also in attendance:-

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

Mr Paul Davies, Assistant Director of Business and Property Services

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Smart Cities

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

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services

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

There were no apologies received.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5th November, 2020

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5th November, 2020 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 8 - Notice of Key Decisions

Councillor Doyle made an open declaration in relation to item no. 200813/493 advising that the organisation for which he worked had undertaken paid consultancy in relation to the Sunnyside regeneration proposals.

Reference from Cabinet – 17 November 2020 – European Union (EU) – Exit Planning

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated), providing the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee with an update on the Council's European Union Exit Planning arrangements and attaching a copy of the report to Cabinet considered at its meeting on 17 November 2020.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Paul Davies, Assistant Director of Business and Property Services briefed the Committee on the report highlighting that an EU Exit Risk Register had been undertaken and had been put in place to ensure potential key risks were identified, assessed and managed as far as possible/practicable in relation to the Council itself to ensure it was able to continue to carry out the services it provided and reduce the impact on Council finances.

Mr Davies referred Members to the key issues which were set out in the report which included additional paperwork and additional customs checks and processes leading to potential delays, potential shortages of food and medicines and medical supplies resulting in potential price rises and leading on from this a potential risk of unrest.

Mr Davies advised that there was a potential impact on those businesses which relied on importing/exporting goods in relation to tariffs as well as those businesses which relied on other businesses which might be impacted by this.

Mr Davies also referred to the EU Structural Funds the Council received for certain projects and the risk if those funds were not replaced by new funds. The Government had announced a UK Shared Prosperity Fund, however the details of how that would be allocated had not been made clear at that point and therefore remained a risk.

Mr Davies advised that businesses were being advised to seek guidance on the measures they needed to put in place for the UK's exit from the EU on 1st January from the Government's website and information was also available on the Council's 'Make it Sunderland' pages. Communications to residents were being planned once the details of the deal with the EU were known.

The Council was tracking the negotiations and looking at what could be done to mitigate risks.

Councillor P. Smith enquired what was being done to mitigate against a shortage of medicines and medical supplies in relation to elderly people and children's homes.

Mr Davies advised that the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) had asked suppliers of medicines to find alternative routes and practices to try and mitigate the risk and create stocks of medical supplies. DHSC was working with the NHS on centralised stocks. There was a process if there was a shortage of individual medicines.

Mr Davies added that Together for Children were aware of the risks and were having discussions as to how they could best respond if something was to happen.

In response to Councillor D. Dixon's enquiry regarding businesses and just in time deliveries, Mr Davies advised that as far as he was aware businesses were making preparations as they had been advised to do by Government which included stockpiling etc and putting contingency arrangements in place. The Business Investment Team was in regular liaison with businesses and trying to support them with preparations.

Councillor Mullen referred to the recent reports in the media in relation to Nissan and Greg Clark's arrangement with the Company when he was Business Secretary and enquired what role the Council had in upholding the deal and the agreement which was put in place at that time.

Councillor Mullen asked if he was correct in thinking that even in a No Deal scenario it was not expected that there would be any impact on the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Mr Davies replied that he was not aware of any issues from the EU exit that should affect the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

In relation to Nissan, he advised that he had not been party to any conversations or detail in relation to any conversations or deals which might have taken place in relation to Nissan and Greg Clark and therefore was unable to comment on this or the future of Nissan or any other businesses in Sunderland. The Business Investment Team maintained regular dialogue with all the major employers in the city and would continue to do that.

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services added that Nissan was a prominent business in Sunderland but was not the only one the Council would look to support. The Council could only do so much as a Council could and also that it needed to be done within the confines of state aid and support. The Council would continue to work with the automotive industry in total, for example the developments that had been done around 5G, the investment around new ideas and new ways of working that would make sure that Sunderland and the supply chain was effective but the immediacy of the response around Brexit needed to be done at a national level in the main. The Council could assist with help and guidance but there was a limit as to how much they could intervene as a Council and this needed to be taken in this context.

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

2. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee note the information in the report and brought out during its consideration.

Performance Management Update – Quarter 2 of 2020/2021

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated), providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 2 of 2020/21.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Smart Cities presented the report advising that the Council's Corporate Performance Management Framework 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 additional Council indicators for organisational health/productive & innovative working, financial management and a council ready for the future.

Ms St Louis 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 additional Council indicators for organisational health, productive and innovative working, financial management and a Council ready for the future.

In response to Councillor D. Dixon, Ms St Louis advised that the Oral Health Strategy was a commitment in the City Plan and that Health colleagues had advised that the Strategy was on track and should be launched at the end of the financial year.

Councillor P. Smith commented that according to the report, the Council had 45 fewer directly employed staff and asked that in future, the report detailed how many staff the Council continued to employ.

Ms St Louis undertook to obtain the information and circulate the details to Members after the meeting.

Councillor Doyle commented that there had been fewer homes built than the previous year and enquired whether this was being attributed to COVID or whether there were other factors to be taken into account.

Ms St Louis replied by saying that the situation fluctuated depending on where the homes were in the building stage and in the planning process and was of the view that this was more as a result of this cycle than as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councillor Mullen referred to the Level 3 qualification in the Dynamic City report and queried why the attainment gap between the Sunderland average and the National average was widening, whether there was a breakdown for A Levels themselves and A Level vocational equivalents, was one of those qualification types the reason for the decline or was it a decline in both the academic A Level qualification and the more vocational alternatives.

Ms St Louis advised that she would confirm the information with Education colleagues and circulate the response to the question following the meeting.

Councillor Turner referred to the commitment to increase the number of people employed in the city centre in office jobs, commented that the Council was building a lot at the Riverside site and enquired whether targets could still be achieved given that more people were working from home as a result of the pandemic.

Ms St Louis advised that the Council was committed to achieve its targets, there had been significant investment in the city centre and construction was on track, however

they would need to see how the virus progressed through the next year and impacted on achievements but there was commitment to hit the targets identified.

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services added that the world had changed in the last 8-9 months and the Council would need to react to this. The city was very close to the seafront and there were some advantages that came with that. Sunderland was a different offer to, for example, central London or central Manchester where there was a very dense conurbation. The Legal and General investment had gone through planning the previous month and there was confidence from the market, however it would probably be a different offer in a couple of years and in five and ten years' time than was envisaged a couple of years ago. The market would continue to evolve and the Council's offer would continue to evolve in response to that.

Councillor Hunt commented that there had been a decrease in the number of affordable houses and that there had been the biggest rise in house prices in 6 years. She enquired what the Council was going to do to ensure there was appropriate housing in the city.

Ms St Louis reminded the Committee that the Council had become a registered social landlord and was pleased and proud to be building its own housing stock and bringing empty properties back into use which would help with the need for more affordable homes.

In response to the Chairman Ms St Louis reminded the Committee that there were 537 additional homes in the city compared with Q2 of 2019/20, there were 8 more completed affordable homes in Quarter 2 of 2020/21 and the Council was on track to have 50 more homes brought back into use by the end of 2021.

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

3. RESOLVED that the information provided in the report and the comments made be received and noted.

Compliments, Complaints and Feedback

The Assistant Director of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated), providing 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 briefed the Committee on the report highlighting the complaints overview at Stage One and Stage two by department.

Ms St Louis referred Members to the compliments received in Quarter 2 which were 210 across Council services in total and pointed out that this was the highest number received for Quarter 2 for two years.

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 an Adult Social Care complaint which had been discontinued because legal action had commenced against the care home by the complainant.

Ms St Louis highlighted the point that the vast majority of the 804 Corporate Complaints for Quarter 2 at Stage one related to the Neighbourhoods Directorate which had 687 and of these, 519 were in respect of refuse services. This was a comparatively low number considering the service carried out 1.6m collections.

There had been 6 Stage two complaints reviewed across Directorates and 3 had been partly upheld, details were included in the report.

There had been 15 complaints received in Quarter 2 regarding adult social care services and 2 had some element upheld or partly upheld.

With regards to Sunderland Care and Support there had been 84 compliments received from 1st July to 30th September 2020 and a summary was provided in the report. Despite the pandemic only 13 complaints had been received by the Company during the same period.

Together for Children had received 51 complaints across the three stages and a breakdown of those and the outcomes were detailed in the Customer Feedback Six Month Summary Report April 2020-September 2020.

Councillor Mullen requested that some of the substance be included in the report to get a sense of the complaints in future. He also requested that with regards to the Environmental Services complaints that they be broken down by ward.

Ms St Louis replied that she would take the above requests back and look to incorporate them in future reports.

Councillor Hunt commented that there had been a sharp increase in complaints around finances in respect of adult social care and queried whether this was related to the pandemic.

Ms St Louis advised that she did not have the information and would provide a written response.

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

4. RESOLVED that the information provided 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, briefed the Committee on the report and advised that the agenda for the meeting on 11th February would include an item on Hate Crime from the Sunderland Partnership.

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

5. 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; and
- (b) 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 9th November, 2020.

(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 get that for them and circulate it.

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

The Chairman closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them a Happy and Safe Christmas.

(Signed) D. MACKNIGHT,
Chairman.