

At a meeting of the NORTH SUNDERLAND AREA COMMITTEE held in REEDHOUSE COMMUNITY CENTRE, RUTHERGLEN ROAD, SUNDERLAND on 21 MARCH, 2024 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Wilson in the Chair

Councillors Bond, Butler, Chisnall, Foster, Hartnack, Samuels, A. Smith, Stewart, Usher, Vera and Walton

Also in Attendance:-

Lee Bell	-	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Services (TWFRS)
Jill Colbert	-	Chief Executive – Sunderland Director of Children’s Services
Peter Curtis	-	NE Sports, Area Network Representative
Steven Gordon	-	Head of Neighbourhoods, Gentoo
Steve Lowther	-	Head of Property, Gentoo
Vivienne Metcalfe	-	Partnership and Community Resilience Manager, Sunderland City Council
Joanne Stewart	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer, Sunderland City Council
Ruth Walker	-	SNYP, Area Network Representative

Chairman’s Welcome

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Chequer, Johnston and McKeith and on behalf of Inspector Stephen Prested and Richy Duggan

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 14 December, 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

North Area Committee Area Plan 2023-2026

The Chairman of the North Sunderland Area Neighbourhood and Community Board submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update on progress against the North Sunderland Area Committee Area Plan priorities which would be the focus for the Committee during 2023-2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Foster presented the report which highlighted progress against the Committee's delivery plan, advising of areas of key action and progress. He also advised Members that the report attached the Committee's delivery plan which highlighted progress and shared good news stories and promotion of projects which were shared at every opportunity.

The report also gave an update on the Council's Service Plans, specifically relevant to the North Sunderland area, which included a quarterly update on progress and was for information purposes only.

In relation to the Highway Maintenance Programme at Annex 3, Ms. Metcalfe advised that there were two options available to the Fulwell Ward of either 1) carriage resurfacing at Lowry Road and Rydal Mount at a combined cost of £13,500 or option 2) concrete slab repairs between Marshall and Dent Street, at Browne Road, at a cost of £20,000.

The information in the report having been fully considered, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- The progress and performance updates with regard to the North Area Committee Plan 2023-2026 be received and noted; and
- The progress update with regard to Sunderland City Council Service Plans – Area Priorities be received and noted for information.
- Option 2 for the Fulwell Ward Capital Maintenance Programme for 2024-2025 be agreed; and
- The recommendations of the Neighbourhood and Community Board regarding the Highways Capital Maintenance Programme for the North Sunderland area for 2024-2025 be agreed.

Partner Agency Reports - Northumbria Police Update

Northumbria Police submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with a community update and key performance information in relation to the North Sunderland Area.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

There being no representative in attendance, Ms. Metcalfe advised that any queries could be forwarded to herself via email and she would pass them on to Northumbria Police for a direct response.

Members having fully considered the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the update report from Northumbria Police be received and noted.

Partner Agency Reports – Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

The Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which gave performance monitoring details in relation to local indicators for the Committee from 13 September to 30 November, 2023.

(for copy report – see original minute)

Mr. Lee Bell, Station Manager, TWFRS, took Members through the report advising of the numbers of deliberate primary and secondary fires, giving a ward breakdown and providing an incident heatmap by ward.

He also provided an update on the changes at Marley Park, whereby North East Ambulance Services (NEAS) now co-located with an ambulance situated at the site on a 7:00am-7:00pm day shift staffing. There was the possibility a second appliance may use the site and also that it may extend to 24 hour coverage. For TWFRS it was an income generator, which also saved NEAS money as they did not need to build their own satellite station to respond from. Mr. Bell explained he could not advise on the impact to the local area but since the agreement had began the vehicle was rarely on site and was out answering calls.

In response to a query from Councillor Vera, Mr. Bell advised that there had been no increase in fires to date from electric car charging points that had been installed around the city.

With regards to water rescue, Mr. Bell advised that TWFRS attended nearly as many rescues from threats of suicide from structures and bridges over water as the London area and that the crew in Byker were the second busiest in the country. Therefore, the decision was made to increase water capacity and training so that there would be more equipment and staff and they could then split the team and cover the River Wear. TWFRS supported the RNLI and the Coastguard from the Spire bridge to the mouth of the Wear and if there was an incident they would attend and have a discussion as to who would take the lead on the rescue. Once up and running it would be a better response for all the residents of Tyne and Wear.

In response to comments from Councillor Usher, Mr. Bell advised that the Fire Cadet Programme ran out of Marley Park, with other stations, and had a range of children taking part; some high achievers who could help influence children who may be going down the wrong path. The programme was very disciplined and it was not a given that everyone would get on and stay on the programme as there were certain standards, conduct and achievements that had to be met throughout the course. He was not fully

invested in the programme but if Members wish to know more he could bring a colleague to a future meeting.

Councillor Butler referred to an incident on a bridge that he had attended and asked why Northumbria Police, and any other first responders, were not trained in using the same equipment that the TWFRS used to secure potential suicide victims. Mr. Bell informed the Committee that he was aware that most response cars would have a throw line and life jacket to provide some kind of initial action but that this would not be to the level that TWFRS did. Rope / Line rescue was a tough skill and the qualification that had to be gained and maintained was probably too much for other responders.

Councillor Wilson referred to discussions that had been held at previous LMAPs meetings regarding bonfire night and the request from TWFRS and Northumbria Police to have a public bonfire. Permission had been granted to allow Hylton Castle as a venue but it was unfair to put the responsibility on the volunteers who ran the site. A meeting would be held with Events Staff from the Council to discuss potential venues and he asked colleagues to let him know of any other venues than the Castle or Roker/Seaburn beaches that they had. Ms. Colbert advised that getting the Events Team together and considering a proposal was the best approach and then an environmental impact and health and safety assessments could be undertaken as part of their process.

There being no further comment or questions for Mr. Bell, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the item be received and noted.

Partner Agency Reports - Report of the North Area Voluntary and Community Sector Network

The Voluntary and Community Sector Network submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update with regard to the North Sunderland Area Voluntary and Community Sector network.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Ruth Walker, Area Network Representative, took Members through the report advising that the network had met five times; June, September, October and December, 2023 and in February 2024, and shared the agenda items that had been covered. She also provided an update in relation to the Links for Like projects which had commenced delivery in January 2024.

When asked how important she felt that mobile phones and free internet/wi-fi were to children today, Ms. Walker advised that nowadays technology was an extension for children and young people who lived a large part of their social life online. They were now past the days where phones were removed from young people as they realised how essential they were to their lives and wellbeing. If children and young people could not be disconnected then they had to be encouraged to be safe and accessed in the proper manner.

Members having no further comments or questions, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Partner Agency Reports - Gentoo Update

Gentoo submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update with regard to the work undertaken by Gentoo between December 2023 to March 2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Steven Gordon, Head of Neighbourhoods, Gentoo, took Members through the report advising of the current situation in relation to the visit from the Police and Crime Commissioner, their Corporate Charity, the Tenancy Sustainment Fund, Estate Walks and Site Garages. An update on the investment and renewal plan was also given, along with a presentation on damp and mould from Mr. Steve Lowther, Head of Property.

Councillor Samuels thanked Officers for their report and commented that it was encouraging to hear Gentoo were looking at practical ways of supporting people. She also referred to the housing regulators finding failings in dealing with anti-social behaviour and asked for some examples and if Officers were confident that Gentoo were not in the same position. Members were informed that the Ombudsman had found that a provider in London had not supported an individual in terms of his needs of being rehoused and how his issues had been tackled. It was explained that in essence it was two customers who had noise complaints against each other; and at Gentoo they had a support team who would put recommendations forward so they felt that issues similar to this were covered. When they had looked at that particular case Gentoo felt that they had processes in place which would have met each of the thirty-six recommendations in the Ombudsman findings report.

Councillor Butler commented that he felt that Gentoo had turned a corner in every area and there had been a couple of incidents in his ward where they had gone above and beyond to rectify them. He referred to a question he had asked some years ago regarding housing veterans and he had been advised by a support group that it had never taken more than fifteen minutes to rehouse a veteran with Gentoo which needed commending. Mr. Gordon advised that they had made a commitment some years ago that they would do what they could to support veterans.

In response to comments from Councillor Butler regarding the lack of means testing for families, Mr. Gordon referred to the hidden sector who were missing that they had a big focus on, families who were working but still struggling, and the sustainability team were supporting families and sharing life skills.

Councillor Walton asked how tenants who may require furniture accessed those facilities and was advised that the neighbourhood coordinator would visit them and make an assessment, providing those details to the Community Sustainable Services so they could select what items were needed. There was some criteria to be met so it was generally for new tenants who had some vulnerability and were either struggling financially or being rehoused.

Councillor Usher referred to complaints regarding contractor parking around the development at Wellspring Park on Hylton Lane and Mr. Gordon advised he would take that issue back and have it dealt with accordingly.

Councillor Chisnall referred to the estate walks they had undertaken, and the issue that had been raised along Ferryboat Lane regarding the provision of laybys, and was informed that he would get further details on why it was not possible to install them and provide feedback directly. Councillor Wilson asked if they could arrange a meeting inviting Highways Services, that was not an estate walk, to discuss if there was the opportunity to develop land that was owned by Gentoo but could not be developed by them, and Mr. Gordon confirmed that this could be arranged.

In response to the current waiting list, Mr. Gordon advised that they had approximately 30,000 people who had applied for housing with Gentoo; with about 7,000-8,000 people who were actively bidding on properties. A proportion of the 30,000 people would be waiting for a particular property in a particular area. He explained that they had less houses becoming vacant; with a turnover of about 3,000 properties per year reducing to 2,400, and demand was continuing to increase, with people not able to purchase houses or afford the private rent increases. Each area of the city had a different level of demand and they were always trying to place those in a priority band first.

Ms. Colbert advised that she had undertaken some assurance work with Mr. Scanlon, Assistant Director of Housing Services, regarding the national review of the number of babies who had died in temporary accommodation as they had not been provided with a cot. She went on to say they were confident that cots were provided in Sunderland and Mr. Gordon asked if the information could be forwarded to him so that he could ensure it was picked up and supported by Gentoo.

Councillor Wilson referred to the presentation the Committee had been given on digital deprivation in the area and wanted to have conversations why particular children were living in poverty and whether this was due to a generational trap. He asked what Gentoo were doing to work with these families and how a cause and solution could be found. Ms. Colbert commented that the Local Trust, a national organisation, had a set of criteria by which they determined 'left behind' areas, which in North Sunderland area were Castle, Redhill and Southwick wards.

Ms. Colbert went on to advise that there were a number of things they could bring into the Area Committee next municipal year which would help paint more of a picture for Members. They could also bring in the Youth Offending Service, who ran some of the prevention work, to give an input into some of the work they were undertaking. There was also a new, dedicated Area Commander which would help bring more of a Sunderland focus.

The family hub in Bunny Hill was now up and running, who could do outreach work into communities and their role was to target those vulnerable families in the area. There was no shortage of willingness to try and do things differently, but services needed to be coordinated effectively. It would be good for the Area Committee to have a sense of all of the interventions that were in place and understand what the lived experience of children in the area was.

Councillor Samuels referred to using the words 'raising aspirations' and that the work that the VCS did in those wards was key to show children the life chances and opportunities that were available to them and that this was really important in changing young people's goals and ambitions.

Councillor Smith referred to digital poverty and how it was not just children and young people that this affected, and how it was important to address this issue in those wards to help raise aspirations for all.

Councillor Wilson referred to previous investigations into food intolerances and the diets of children and young people, and how it could be a quite simple process to investigate if children were triggered by certain foods and asked if this was something that could be looked into further for children in the city. Ms. Colbert commented that there was a GP clinical lead for children who worked with the Integrated Care Board in Sunderland, and they had seen a big increase in the number of young children referred for ADHD or ASD assessments. There was a lot of evidence that poor diet, sleep habits and access to open spaces could be linked to this and they had Community Dieticians and Community Therapists who would be really interested to share information on the subject.

Having no further comments or questions, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Partner Agency Reports – Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance (SVSA)

Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an update for the period of October 2023-February 2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Metcalfe advised that the report was for information only. She advised that it had been agreed last year that they would provide an update from the SVSA. This first report was generic but going forward, the report would refer to more specific projects which they were supporting in the North Sunderland Area.

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted for information.

North Sunderland Area Committee Budget Report

The Assistant Director of Housing and Communities submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided a financial statement as an update position on progress in relation to allocating Area Committee Neighbourhood Funds and Community Chest and presented proposals for further funding requests.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Metcalfe, Area Community Development Lead, presented the report drawing attention to the recommendations detailed therein.

There being no questions or comments, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the financial statements as set out in tables 1 and 2 be received and noted;
- (ii) the alignment of £20,000 from the Neighbourhood Fund for Youth Activities be approved;
- (iii) the approvals for Community Chest supported from the 2023/2024 budget as set out in the report be noted.

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

(Signed) D. WILSON,
Chairman.