

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CITY HALL on TUESDAY 11TH JANUARY 2022 at 4.30 p.m.

Present: -

Councillor S. Foster in the Chair

Councillors Ali, M. Dixon, Edgeworth, Fagan, Foster, Greener, Laws, Price, Taylor, and Warne.

Also in attendance: -

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Martin Miles – Reginal Contract Manager

Mr Ian Bradgate - Contract Manager – Sunderland.

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

Appointment of the Chairman.

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice Chairman, a nomination was sought to Chair this meeting of the Committee. Councillor S. Foster having been nominated by Councillor Laws and duly seconded by Councillor M. Dixon, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that Councillor Foster be appointed Chairman for this meeting of the Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors D. Snowdon and Thornton.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 7th December 2021

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 7th December, 2021 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 7th December, 2021 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest

Leisure Services - Update

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with an update on progress on the operation of leisure services in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Martin Miles, Regional Contract Manager and Ian Bradgate, Contract Manager – Sunderland of Everyone Active presented the report along with a PowerPoint presentation and were on hand to answer Members queries.

Councillor Ali thanked the officers for their presentation and referred to the 15% rise in energy costs and enquired that as they had over 200 leisure centres, was an increase in membership prices inevitable due to this.

Mr Miles advised that their energy was bought in advance on the open market so they knew what their prices were going to be going forward so they were confident that that there wouldn't have to be any rises above inflation for this year.

In response to Councillor Ali's query, Mr Miles advised that the Swimming lessons take up had increased by 10% more than pre covid levels.

Councillor Ali enquired if the £3.6 million spent had been on refurbishment works to the centres and if there were any plans to update further or just maintaining the centres. Mr Miles advised that the leisure stock was okay and most of the money had been spent at Silksworth, the Aquatic Centre and Hetton with minor refurbishment works needing to be done moving forward.

With regards to Councillor Ali's query over the furlough scheme and if this had helped, Mr Miles informed the Committee that they had four Members of staff working during that period and the rest had been furloughed so it had been a great help.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired as to the trends/types of people who had used the facilities and if new types of customers had come forward after the lockdowns and restrictions loosened or if it was the regulars from before.

Mr Bradgate advised that they did get new people and groups signing up, people who had been on their own during the lockdowns and many from the over 50's population who wanted to get as fit as possible due to the current environment.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that the East Area Committee had worked with Everyone Active on the Raich Carter Centre in the past and enquired if the officers had any thoughts as to where they could work better to take the Centre forward. Mr Bradgate advised that they had just recruited an Active Communities Manager for that very reason and to engage with local communities and different people.

Councillor M. Dixon suggested it would be nice to see Everyone Active come along to a future Neighbourhood Board/Area Committee meeting to discuss the Raich Carter Centre.

Councillor Fagan commented that the Raich Carter Centre Swimming Pool had been given a delayed opening after the lockdown restrictions were lifted and that four different reasons had been given for this ranging from vandalisms that had occurred to economic reasons and enquired if a definitive answer could be given on this.

Mr Miles commented that he understood the decision taken had been a financial one as the Raich Carter Centre was the least well attended facility in the area and they were trying to balance the books at that particular point in time. Mr Miles commented that he believed they had the right strategy, the pool was now open and that he appreciated that this had taken a while, but they were making efforts to attract residents to use the facility.

Councillor Edgeworth referred to schools in Hendon which had difficulty accessing other facilities due to travelling issues whilst the Raich Carter Centre was closed and enquired if Everyone Active had been aware of this. Mr Bradgate advised that 70% of schools had used Silksworth Centre instead and that they hadn't been asked directly to fund measures for transporting those students having problems but if they were to be asked they could certainly look into this.

In response to Councillor Edgeworth raising residents comments on the demolition of the Crowtree Centre, their wish for a City Centre Facility and if this was just a pipedream, Mr Miles commented that this was more of a strategic decision that needed to be taken by the Council and that every Council and local population desired different things.

Mr Miles commented that Everyone Active hadn't been here when the Crowtree Centre was closed and that Town Centres were changing but if there was a will for a new Centre by all, they would be happy to work with the Council on that.

Councillor Price thanked the officers for a great presentation and enquired if they could give an outline of their apprenticeships and how they were working. Mr Bradgate advised that in the first 6-12 months they had 45 apprentices which had moved into management positions now. They were working with Sunderland College to take on traineeships and they felt this had been a real success and they could send on their good news stories if they so wished.

Councillor Price commented that the Houghton Sports Centre and the Old Welfare Hall were dear to his heart and that he thought they needed investment and enquired if there were any plans for this. Mr Miles informed the Committee that the Old Welfare Hall had been redecorated and repaired with the outside also having been repainted. The Bowls Hall was getting back to the attendance numbers it had been achieving. The Bowls Club were back after an issue with the roof which had now been sorted and they were confident the bowls figures would be back to where they were pre covid.

Councillor Taylor wished to raise his disappointment that there were no officers from Sunderland City Council in attendance at the meeting, as this was a joint venture and a number of issues had been raised which weren't within the remit of Everyone Active, whose Officers had taken the time to attend, he felt that there should have been representation from the Council there also.

Councillor Taylor referred to the issue of Energy and enquired if any of the facilities had solar panels installed on their roof to capture energy this way. Mr Miles advised that there was a need to be looking at doing things differently in their targets to achieve net zero and carbon reductions. There was currently a review on each of their facilities and they could report back on this once it was completed, however this was on the basis of working with the Council and dependant on Government funding.

Councillor Fagan commented that the roof of the Aquatic Centre had recently been replaced and queried if this had been a missed opportunity to instal solar panels at the same time. Mr Miles advised that the roof works were contracted between the Council and the building contractor which he believed had been through a legal process therefore he was not in the best position to advise on that and he would have to refer to Council Officers for a reply.

Councillor M. Dixon referred to the Raich Carter and its static attendance numbers and commented that he was slightly disappointed with this as he believed the engagement measures should've been attempted long before now. Mr Miles advised that in the past, experience of areas of mass depravation had shown it was more difficult to attract more people into its centres and it was about getting its community leaders on board and not something everyone active could do on its own, but needed a real collaboration.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that there were so many organisations in Hendon and encouraged the Officers to get in touch with those as there had been plenty of opportunity for this to be done in the past. The area greatly needed it and he hoped the next time officers came they could report of improvements having been seen.

Mr Miles advised that hopefully when they were invited to attend the next meeting they would be able to give a more positive update. Mr Bradgate advised they had engaged with the organisations in the area in the past but there hadn't always been the sustainability needed.

Councillor Ali wished to echo Councillor Taylors comments that a number of the questions posed at the meeting could have been answered by Council Officers and it wasn't entirely fair on the Everyone Active representatives and the Councillors appreciated everything they were doing.

Having fully considered the report, the Chairman thanked Mr Miles and Mr Bradgate on behalf of the Committee for their attendance.

3. RESOLVED that the progress report be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2021-22

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), to provide options, provide support and advise Members on the development of the scrutiny work programmes for 2021/2022

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Members information and advised that the Sunnyside Working Group continued to meet and they should have a report to bring to the Committee within the next few months.

Councillor Edgeworth referred to the upcoming report on Housing and enquired if Gentoo ever presented reports to the Committee or if this could be considered.

Councillor Laws agreed that Gentoo should provide presentations and suggested they be invited to the next meeting as the issues of Housing were not just covered by the Council.

Councillor M. Dixon suggested that if Gentoo were to be invited, that there needed to be some specificity as to what they were to present on, such as repairs, waiting lists for example.

Councillor Laws commented that he received many queries from residents around the replacement of their windows as there seemed to be ever changing dates for this and they would like definitive answers.

Councillor Laws also referred to the changing of staff within Gentoo and whilst he understood there had been massive changes he would like to see if there could be a level of stability from them.

Councillor Fagan advised that she would like to see the results of the satisfaction surveys from tenants and how Gentoo manages their complaints procedure as she found them one of the hardest organisations to work with in dealing with residents complaints.

Councillor Edgeworth suggested that details of Gentoo's strategy for affordable housing and homes for social rent be considered rather than statistics on their private sales.

Councillor Taylor informed the Committee that in terms of localised housing issues, Members could contact the Neighbourhood Managers at Gentoo and invite them along to Ward Surgeries and that in his experience they have been more than happy to attend. Councillor Taylor advised that he had no problems in asking Gentoo to attend a future meeting and suggested that they bring their plans on upgrading the social housing network.

Councillor Ali agreed with Councillor Taylor in relation to the Neighbourhood Managers and advised that he had felt progress was made via this route when he was dealing with residents issues. Councillor Ali also commented that Gentoo were ultimately a business and a business mentality had to be taken when dealing with them.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that as a Committee they were looking at the whole of the City, in a much more broader way, therefore he felt the replacement windows, repairs and social housing were good topics for consideration and that it would be useful to see how progress was being made on the recently approved Planning applications for social housing developments.

The Chairman agreed with Members suggestions made and advised that it may not be possible for Gentoo to attend the next upcoming meeting but they should certainly be invited to attend a meeting in the future.

Councillor M. Dixon suggested that if Gentoo could not attend the next meeting that the report on Housing from Graham Scanlon be moved so that both items be considered together.

Mr Diamond informed the Committee that he would make enquiries with Gentoo on their availability.

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2021-2022 be noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 13th December, 2021 (copies circulated).

(For copy report and notice – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer reminded Members to contact him if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

Councillor Fagan requested more information regarding 21112/658 and the disposal of Norfolk Hotel. Mr Diamond advised that he would seek more detail on this.

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

The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) S. FOSTER,
Chairman.