

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 12th MARCH, 2020 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Hunt in the Chair

Councillors D. Dixon, Francis, Heron, Jenkins, Oliver and Turner.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Chris Binding, Local Democracy Reporter

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

Ms Gillian Gibson, Director of Public Health, Sunderland City Council

Ms Lorraine Hughes, Public Health Specialist

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services

Mr Graham Scanlon, Assistant Director of Housing Services, Neighbourhoods Directorate

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Digital and Customer Services, Corporate Services Directorate

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Hodson, D. MacKnight, F. Miller, P. Smith, Speding and D. Trueman.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13th February, 2020

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13th February, 2020 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Performance Management Update

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2019/2020.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Ms Liz St Louis, Assistant Director of Digital and Customer Services, Corporate Services Directorate presented the report. 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 good organisational health, productive and innovative working, strong financial management and a Council ready for the future.

Councillor Heron expressed concern at the declining healthy life expectancy of females in Sunderland in comparison with previous data in 2012-2014 and also in comparison with England and the North East region and commented that it needed to be kept an eye on.

Councillor Oliver referred to the number of people employed in the City Centre and to the data which showed that this had only increased by 16 over a 3 year period. He enquired whether there was an expectation that this should be increasing at a faster rate.

Ms St Louis advised that lots of plans were coming to fruition such as the Riverside development and it was thought that the numbers of jobs would continue on that trajectory. The first companies had taken up office space in the first building on Riverside Sunderland and they were trying hard to attract more in.

Mr Jon Ritchie, Executive Director of Corporate Services added that this was integral to the decision by Legal and General, who only build grade A buildings, to build the property on the Riverside site if they felt they could fill it. The first building would be submitted for planning approval in the next couple of months and he was confident that the figures would feed in.

Councillor Oliver enquired whether the Council would be doing things to get people to live in the city centre.

Ms St Louis stated that there were a number of planning applications in, or would be going in. It was about attracting the right jobs and having the right properties as well, right across the board to reflect the whole spectrum.

Councillor Oliver commented that it was disappointing to see that the number of women who smoke at the time of delivery had only fallen slightly. He enquired whether the strategies being employed were working and what the challenges were that they were coming up against.

Ms Lorraine Hughes, Public Health Specialist advised that it was a really challenging area to deliver. More recent data was showing that the number was reducing. There was a Programme Adviser as part of a specialist stop smoking unit. One of the challenges was the process of referral from midwifery. However, already in this quarter, there were a lot more who had quit smoking. There was a need to get the message across to women. There was a new regular pathway where they were now talking about smoking in terms of having a tobacco dependency rather than a lifestyle choice and of providing support to help with their addiction and linking in with the whole agenda around a smoke free NHS. It was about breaking down professional barriers. Ms Hughes stated that women expected to be asked about smoking in pregnancy. They wanted to stop smoking while pregnant but it was

important that they did not relapse after they had their baby. There was a lot of focus on this and how to improve the situation and get more women into the service.

Under the Dynamic City theme, the Chairman enquired when it was anticipated that the Empty Property Strategy would be published.

Mr Graham Scanlon, Assistant Director of Housing Services, Neighbourhoods Directorate advised that the Empty Property Strategy was now completed and would be going to Cabinet for approval on 24th March. He added that the Council would be undertaking wider empty property engagement with partners to ensure that the strategy was understood and wider enforcement with landlords and focussed action, targeting some areas to acquire empty properties in the city.

The Chairman enquired what the Council was doing to prepare for the coronavirus epidemic.

Ms St Louis advised that daily meetings were in place to discuss arrangements. The Senior Management Team had held a three and a half hour desktop exercise earlier that day. Active plans were in place and all critical functions were being reviewed in the Council. ICT colleagues were building windows 10 laptops to issue to staff to enable them to work from home. Communications would be circulated across the workforce the next day in relation to self-isolation due to the virus and also in respect of caring proposals.

Councillor Francis commented that it was important to raise awareness to young women at school of the dangers of smoking.

Councillor Oliver commented that residents were concerned about how much was not recycled from household waste. He enquired what actually happened to what people put in the bins.

Ms St Louis stated that there was a whole strategy around waste and recycling and that the Council was putting in a lot of effort in with a whole host of actions. There was a piece of work going on around communications to the public to get the right messages across.

Councillor Oliver referred to the current level of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting at 26.5% and the aim to improve this to 32%, or better by 2021. He enquired how Sunderland compared with others in the region.

Ms St Louis replied to say that she did not have the information with her and that she would send this on to Councillor Oliver.

Councillor Francis commented that it would be useful to have a uniform system between Local Authorities so that people were aware of what could be recycled and that this would reduce confusion on the matter.

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

2. RESOLVED that the report providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance information for Quarter 3 of 2019/2020 be received and noted.

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2019

The Director of Public Health, Sunderland City Council submitted a report (copy circulated) to present the findings of the Annual Report 2019.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Ms Lorraine Hughes, Public Health Specialist highlighted that the report presented the findings of a series of engagement and learning activities undertaken during the autumn of 2019, as well as a residents' survey, workshops and two conferences, all aimed at working together to improve health.

Ms Hughes drew Members attention to the point that an inequalities and prevention framework had been developed for the city in response to the stark inequalities in health outcomes both between Sunderland and the rest of the country and within the city itself.

Ms Hughes highlighted that the issue of mental wellbeing was a key theme in a number of their engagement activities. Another key theme was the importance of making food affordable.

The Chairman commented that she was pleased to hear that they were going to use the results to develop the strategy to improve health in the city.

Councillor D. Dixon referred to the information detailed in the report which stated that Sunderland had twice as many teenage mothers as the England average. He asked about the take-up of C Cards and whether the level of distribution had gone back up to previous levels.

Ms Hughes advised that she would circulate the figures separately. She stated that C Cards had made a significant impact. They had been developed with young people and the numbers had gone up. The majority of C Cards were distributed through the school nursing service and therefore this dipped when the schools were closed. Some schools had declined from having the C Card service in school and therefore there was community provision in place in those areas. They were looking at how they could get more youth providers to offer the service. Things were going well with this at the moment.

Councillor Dixon enquired what other plans there were to reduce the number of teenage mothers in Sunderland.

Ms Hughes advised that work was ongoing and the gap had been narrowed. There were specific projects such as B to B, Bump to Baby and projects for first time Mums to try and prevent a subsequent pregnancy. There was also advice to young people around when they chose to be sexually active that they did so safely. They were seeing a reduction in the number of pregnancies as a result of all of these initiatives.

Councillor Dixon commented that one of the consequences of deprivation was inequalities and one of the most significant consequences was oral health and the number of incidences of people having their teeth taken out. He asked about having a dental section in the report.

Ms Gillian Gibson, Director of Public Health, Sunderland City Council advised that this report was an overview. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment sat behind the report and did contain some of the information Councillor Dixon was referring to. Ms Gibson advised that she would try and include the information in the next annual report.

Councillor Oliver commented that it was a very interesting report. He referred to the point that one in ten children were obese when they entered primary school and that this increased to one in four when they left. He enquired how this impacted on educational attainment.

Ms Hughes advised that childhood obesity was generally at a higher rate in the north east, but that this was a problem throughout England and there was a strong correlation with deprivation and levels of educational attainment, not so much in Reception, but that by Year 6, it was very marked.

Councillor Heron commented that cyber bullying had a lot to do with children's mental health and self-esteem and work needed to be concentrated on this.

Ms Gibson commented that she concurred with Councillor Heron and that across the city there was a lot of concern about children's mental health. She added that they were putting in another bid to be a trailblazer for this.

Ms Hughes added that included in the 0-19 offer there was a service for emotional health and wellbeing with two nurses who offered drop-ins and 1-2-1s. The service was inundated and more resources were needed, which they were hoping would come through the trailblazer.

The Chairman enquired whether there was anything surprising which had come out in the consultation process that they had not highlighted as issues themselves.

Ms Gibson advised that they had been thinking about food in terms of unhealthy diets but had not realised the strength of food poverty and that this had hit home through personal stories.

Ms Hughes added that to follow healthy eating guidelines, the poorest families would need to spend 75% of their income on food.

The Chairman enquired what Public Health was doing to prepare for the coronavirus.

Ms Gibson advised that they were being led by Public Health England. At the moment, they were focussing on communications messages about hand washing which would slow down the spread of the disease and other preventative measures.

Ms Gibson clarified that there was no need for sanitiser gel and that soap and water was sufficient. The country had a wonderful NHS, however the service had its limits. People were being asked to self-isolate so that when they needed a hospital bed, there would be one available. The wheels were being oiled between the NHS and the Council so that when support was needed, they would be able to do so. In terms of social care for example, there would be a time when hospitals would need to discharge people who still needed to be looked after and so the Council was looking at business continuity. It was a similar situation if the schools needed to close.

These were all critical functions. A tabletop exercise would be undertaken to test out business continuity arrangements and ensure that they were all working together as a city.

Councillor Oliver referred to the section on the importance of mental wellbeing which commented on the sedentary nature of modern forms of play and how they were all highlighted as potentially damaging.

Ms Gibson stated that this impacted on resilience, fitness levels and weight. She added that if someone was not active as a child, it was unlikely that they were going to be active as an adult and therefore this might result in problems in later life.

Full consideration having been given to the report and there being no further questions for Ms Gibson or Ms Hughes, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the findings of the Director of Public Health's Annual Report be received and noted.

Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2019/20

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 2019/20 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2019/20.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

4. RESOLVED that:-
 - (a) the variations to the Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2019/20 and to its own work programme, be noted; and
 - (b) the current expenditure and remaining scrutiny budget for 2019/20 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 24th February, 2020.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

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.