

**At a meeting of the HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in Committee Room 1 of the CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY, 2024 at 5:30pm.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Usher in the Chair

Councillors Bond, Burnicle, Graham-King, Haque, Heron, Jones, Speding, M. Walker and Walton

**Also in attendance:-**

Nigel Cummings – Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council  
Andrea Hetherington - Director of Corporate Affairs and Legal, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust  
Sarah Norman – Senior Public Health Practitioner, Sunderland City Council  
Julie Parker-Walton – Public Health Consultant, Sunderland City Council  
Joanne Stewart – Principal Democratic Services Officer, Sunderland City Council  
Gerry Taylor – Executive Director Health, Housing and Communities, Sunderland City Council

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were given on behalf of Councillor Hunter.

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 16 January, 2024**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 16 January, 2023 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to the removal of Gerry Taylor from the attendance as her apologies had been submitted.

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

Councillor Jones made an open declaration as an employee of the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NECIC).

**Update on the Sunderland Alcohol Strategy ‘Calling Time: It’s Time to Rethink Drink’ and Supporting Action Plan**

The Executive Director Health, Housing and Communities submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with an update on the Sunderland Alcohol Strategy and supporting action plan.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Sarah Norman, Senior Public Health Practitioner took Members through the report advising that the strategy had been officially launched in July, 2023, setting out seven key priorities which had formed the basis of the partnership action plan.

The Committee were advised of the three objectives of the strategy; prevention and early intervention, providing specialist interventions to promote a quality treatment and recovery system, and protecting children, young people and families from alcoholic related harm. The Sunderland Drug and Alcohol Harm Reduction Group led the development of the action plan, which had then been agreed by the partnership, which comprised of key stakeholders and was chaired by the Chairman of the Sunderland Health and Wellbeing Board and Cabinet Member for Healthy City.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Norman for their informative report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

In response to a query from Councillor Speding regarding the Balance programme, Ms. Norman advised that they worked with Balance and that they had been involved in the strategy implementation groups and featured in the action plan. In terms of the latest campaign from Balance, the Team had uplifted it and had quite a lot of local coverage of the campaign; they also contributed to the programme as a Council along with seven other local authorities.

In a follow-up comment from Councillor Speding regarding the seven causes of cancer campaign which seemed a more independent to Public Health, Ms. Taylor advised that they worked very closely with Balance and agreed the content of each years' programme of work to ensure that it aligned with our priorities and provided them with feedback. They also received quarterly monitoring forms where they were given the opportunity to provide feedback on other campaigns.

Councillor Speding also referred to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), commenting that it was due to be signed off later that month, and asked if the Committee would have sight of it, particularly in relation to the actions around alcohol. Ms. Taylor advised that they were preparing a summary of the JSNA on an annual basis. The JSNA remained a live document as new data was released and they ensured that the strategy remained in line with their findings. They also had individual chapters which could pick up detail of specific areas, either population groups or health risks or issues that they looked at as part of the JSNA process.

Councillor Walton asked for some background information on the Balance programme and was advised that it had been around for a number of years, working across seven local authorities and along with promoting campaigns, undertook lobbying government around issues such as minimum unit price and a national alcohol strategy, whilst also having an important role in bringing partners together across the local authorities to discuss areas such as licensing and regulatory services.

Councillor Bond referred to the social changes post CoVid and how residents were now drinking at home, rather than going to public houses, and asked if the strategy had changed to try and tackle those problems.

Ms. Norman advised that they had gathered a lot of information post CoVid and the strategy had been developed last year, therefore they had been able to incorporate a section around the impact CoVid had. The action plan would be a live, fluid document, which over 70 members of the group fed into, and it would capture any emerging trends, allowing partners to be able to react to them. Ms. Parker-Walton explained that they also worked closely with regulatory services and had initiatives around responsible retailing and the environment around alcohol advertising policies and marketing.

Councillor Bond commented that he had not noticed any change in the emphasis of the public health message to outline drinking at home as a problem and Ms. Parker-Walton advised it was an issue she could look into further and feedback to Balance, although a lot of the campaigns in general were around not drinking too much alcohol, rather than focussing on where residents were drinking.

Councillor Haque raised the issue of cheap alcohol and asked what they were doing to reduce the amount on sale and was informed that the team worked very closely with the licensing team; so for instance, they received a copy of every licensing application that was submitted, as well as mediating with retailers and looked for model conditions which could be included such as the strength of alcohol being sold or the sale of single cans and bottles to deter the availability of cheap alcohol. They also continued to be involved in the work of minimum unit pricing and lobbying government.

Councillor Burnicle commented on the number of non-alcoholic alternatives available on the market and commented that at times it was more of a habit for people to have a drink at home on an evening and asked what, if anything, was done to promote 0% alternatives now. Ms. Taylor commented that there was a lack of evidence so far to base any decision on. There had been a government consultation recently on lower and non-alcohol beverages which they had responded to, but added that there were a number of issues in relation to them, such as how they were advertised and promoted, and what impact they had; did they reduce the amount of alcohol consumed or did it encourage drinking.

Ms. Parker-Walton went on to advise that it was not an area they would promote currently but that it was an area that needed more thought and more evidence before making any further decisions on their promotion.

The Chairman asked what happened to retailers who were found guilty of selling counterfeit goods and what was being done to discourage them? Ms. Norman advised that they worked quite closely with licensing and trading standards and it would be trading standards, along with the police, who would approach retailers in these instances as they had further powers to test alcohol being sold but they did support them and held regular meetings to understand where it may be happening and the implications it could have.

In response to a further query from the Chairman regarding street pastors, Ms. Norman advised that they were a recognised voluntary organisation that predominately helped within the nighttime economy providing people with bottles of water, flip flops or to contact family members if they needed collecting from the city centre after a night out.

The Chairman referred to areas in his ward where young people congregated to drink alcohol and Ms. Norman advised that through the Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant they had funded an additional outreach post so when intelligence was received they could then target those areas. Officers advised Members to share any similar intelligence with them and they could look to target areas around the city.

Councillor Walton asked if they worked in partnership with the Youth Offending Service or Probation and he was advised that they were part of the Drug and Alcohol Harm Reduction Group so they were involved and consulted with.

Councillor Jones referred to one of the actions under objective 2 – exploration of regional opportunities for inpatient detox beds and asked how many beds were commissioned for planned detox's? Ms. Norman advised that she would get the figures circulated to Members but informed the Committee that regionally, Sunderland always used their provision effectively and never had an underspend. She also advised it was on a case-by-case basis and that the budget could vary on need.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Ms. Norman and colleagues for their report and attendance, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report and the progress that was being made to the Sunderland Alcohol Strategy be received and noted and the supporting action plan be endorsed.

### **Changes to Health Scrutiny Arrangements**

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided an overview of changes that were being made to health scrutiny in England through legislation and guidance issued by the Department for Health and Social Care on 9 January, 2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Coordinator, took Members through the report which set out the changes that were being made to health scrutiny and explained what this would mean in reality for the Committee. He also advised that the powers and duties for health scrutiny and the existing arrangements in their broader sense would continue.

Mr. Cummings referred to FAQ's guidance which had been produced by the Centre for Governance and Public Scrutiny and informed Members he would circulate the link to this for their information.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Cummings for his report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Members discussed what the changes would mean to the Scrutiny Committee in real terms, especially in relation to being in a joint NHS trust with South Tyneside, and

were informed that if a reconfiguration of services would only effect one or the other local authority area then that local authority would be the statutory consultee health scrutiny committee. Should the issue be across both authorities then they would have the opportunity to form a joint scrutiny committee, similar to that during the path to excellence, which would then become the statutory consultee.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Mr. Cummings for his report, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the information within the report be received and noted.

### **Work Programme 2023/24**

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2023/24 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and briefed the Committee on the current position regarding those items already scheduled on the work programme and those waiting to be programmed in on a suitable date.

Mr. Cummings advised that

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

There being no further items of business, the Chairman closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) J. USHER,  
Chairman.

