

At a meeting of the SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY, 6TH APRIL 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D.E. Snowdon in the Chair.

Councillors Bond, Curtis, Doyle, Hartnack, Mullen, P. Smith, H. Trueman and Watson.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate

Mrs Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Corporate Affairs

Ms Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members Support Co-ordinator, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Directorate

Mrs Christine Tilley, Governance Services Team Leader, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate

Mr Nik Marco, Local Democracy Reporter

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Edgeworth, Mason-Gage and D. Snowdon.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 9th March 2023

Councillor Mullen questioned the accuracy of the response on page 3, paragraph 3 given by Mr Davies as noted in the minutes and the Governance Services Officer was asked to check the notes made at the meeting.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 9th March 2023 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above matter.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

The Chair, Councillor D.E. Snowdon made an open declaration in relation to the Performance Management Update report as the Chair of Columbia Community Association which was taking part in the Warm Spaces Project.

Performance Management Update – Quarter 3 of 2022/23

Mrs Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Corporate Affairs submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2022/23.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mrs Poulter 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, key achievements and progress made for each key theme, as well as performance against the additional Council indicators for good organisational health, strong financial management, productive and innovative working and a Council ready for the future.

The Committee raised a number of questions under each of the key themes as follows:-

Dynamic Smart City

Councillor Mullen highlighted the declining figure in relation to NVQ L4 qualifications and the importance of a more robust skills strategy within the Council with more focus on developing high level skills. He asked for more information as to what was happening, what the reasons were behind this decline, what the Council was intending to do and how the devolution deal would affect this going forward.

Mrs Poulter stated that the issue was very much on the Devolution Agenda as well as the Council agenda and the Partnership agenda. It was a very difficult subject and area of work to get to grips with. Better measures were needed and this would be looked at. She offered to bring progress back on this to the Committee as to where they were at as a City, as the Council had fewer levers than the College or University for example.

Councillor Curtis asked in relation to the employment rate in Sunderland, if those people who were classed as disabled could be separated out to see whether they were being supported back into work.

Mrs Poulter said that she would take this away and ask whether this information could be provided and report back.

Councillor Watson commented that the number of completed affordable homes had declined in quarter 3 and that there was no mention of Social Housing in the report. She asked if the figures in relation to Social Housing could be included in future reports.

Mrs Poulter advised that there were increases in Social Housing targets and that she could bring back a separate report on this.

Councillor Watson referred to the plans for film studios in Sunderland and commented that greater training to carry out roles within the industry would be needed to help people secure the jobs there.

Mrs Poulter agreed with Councillor Watson and commented that the expectation was that there would be a myriad of jobs and opportunities available in the film industry.

Councillor Doyle enquired in terms of electrical vehicle usage via the rapid charging station, whether the Council was monitoring trends and usage taking into account the wider network not just one charging point.

Mrs Poulter advised that she would have a look at this and report back.

Councillor Hartnack referred to the decline in completed affordable homes from 16.4% to 6.3% for the current year and asked what the reasons were for this.

Mrs Poulter advised that she would get the information and provide a response on this.

The Chair, Councillor D.E. Snowdon: pointed out the graph in relation to Business Incubator Occupancy had some figures missing for Q3 2021/22 and Q3 2022/23.

Mrs Poulter undertook to provide the missing information to the Committee.

Healthy Smart City

Councillor Bond commented on the rise in Teenage Pregnancy and asked if there could be some feedback provided in relation to the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. He added that it would be good to see the national trend.

Mrs Poulter stated that information could be brought back on Teenage Pregnancy. She added that there had been a spike during COVID. There was a strategy in place and she would be pleased to bring a summary back to the Committee on this and would be able to supply comparative figures.

Councillor Hartnack commented that the amount of litter when coming into Sunderland was disgraceful. He asked for clarification as to what "the percentage of relevant land and highways assessed as having deposits of litter that fall below an acceptable level" meant, which was in Q3 7.5% and what the Council could do to improve this.

Mrs Poulter provided an explanation of what the performance indicator actually meant and stated that she would send the definition to the Committee.

The Chair referred to the increase in the uptake of the National Healthy Start Programme in Sunderland to 81% and thanked the Communications Team for the work they had done in highlighting the programme. The Chair stated that she had promoted the programme and encouraged others to do so too.

Councillor Bond stated that he had asked for National comparator figures on household waste recycling, reuse and composting to be included in the report previously and was not happy that this had not happened. He referred to the fact that household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting had reduced in Quarter 3 to 26% and advised that the national comparator figure was 45%. The best Councils were achieving 64/65%. Out of 338 Councils Sunderland was ranked 311th for recycling waste.

Mrs Poulter reported that the comparative data previously requested was included in the narrative of the report, however if Councillor Bond would like to see this as a graphical representation that she would speak to the relevant Officers to provide this going forward.

Vibrant Smart City

Councillors Curtis, Hartnack, P. Smith and Trueman highlighted a number of issues regarding policing including that the system for reporting crimes was broken in that it was difficult to get through on the telephone, there was a lack of Police resources within the city, peoples' perceptions and fear of crime was at a high level and that the City should be pushing politically for its fair share of policing resources.

Councillor Mullen enquired about the visitor numbers and overall spend in the City. He referred to the justification provided for scrapping the Airshow and its replacement with the Triathlon. He asked for a comparison to be made between the Airshow and the Triathlon to see which event brought more money into the City.

At this juncture, Councillor Doyle prepared to leave the meeting and as he was retiring from the Council and this was his last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, the Chair thanked him for his contributions to the work of the Committee and wished him well for the future.

Councillor Curtis welcomed a comparison being made to the two events detailed above.

Councillor Curtis commented that it was good to see the figures improving regarding Children in Need and Child Protection Plans.

Councillor Curtis asked if the Committee could be provided with a main overview of the Tourism Strategy.

Councillor Curtis also asked from the Warm Spaces Project, how many had continued.

Mrs Poulter advised that she could provide a summary of the main pillars of the Tourism Strategy and figures relating to the Warm Spaces Project.

Organisational Health

Councillor Mullen commented that since moving into City Hall he had experienced difficulty in getting to speak to Officers on the telephone and he had also experienced problems with the Call Centre itself in getting calls answered and that there had been a long wait on the line; residents had told him of similar experiences.

Mrs Poulter stated that Officers should be still available and contactable whether working at home or in City Hall even though they no longer had a desk phone. If a Member of the Public needed to speak to an Officer, there should be a contact number so that the Contact Centre could route the call to them and this would be logged. Mrs Poulter stated that she would provide some data on calls.

Councillor Hartnack asked whether it was now time for a survey on how we operated as a Council and stated that he had a similar concern in not being able to get in touch with people.

Councillor Hartnack stated that the Committee needed national comparators to see how the Council was performing. He referred to sickness absence in the Council which seemed high and pointed out that the national average was 4.5 sick days per employee. He said the Committee needed to know what the reasons were for this high sickness rate and put pressure on the Leadership to reduce it. He asked what was being done to reduce this rate and what were the cases.

Mrs Poulter stated that she would provide more detail and national data where this was possible in future reports.

Councillor Smith commented that the Council had lost another 75 more staff and that this might be having an impact on the sickness rate for the staff who remained.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mrs Poulter for her attendance and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee Annual Report 2022/23

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) asking the Committee to approve the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee report as part of the overall scrutiny annual report 2022/23 that was to be presented to Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate presented the report advising that the full completed version of the Annual Report would be presented to the Committee's next meeting.

Councillor Watson referred to paragraph 2 of the report and questioned the wording where it stated that:-

“The Committee was **pleased** to note that the proposed rise in Council Tax will be one of the lowest in the Country.”

Councillor Mullen asked that as much notice as possible be provided to Cabinet Members so that they could attend future Scrutiny meetings when invited to do so.

Mr Cummings confirmed that this would be done and that Cabinet Members would also be invited to attend the Scrutiny workshops.

Following full consideration of the report it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be approved subject to the deletion of the word “pleased” from the wording detailed above and being amended to a form of words to acknowledge that the proposed rise in Council Tax will be one of the lowest in the Country.

Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members’ information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2022/23, together with the Committee’s own programme which provided an opportunity for review.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate having presented the report updating Members on the current position regarding the Work Programmes of the Scrutiny Committees, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committees’ work programmes for 2022/23 and the variations to these work programmes be noted, together with the current scrutiny budget position for 2022/23.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member 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 15th March 2023.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Consideration having been given to the report, it was :-

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

The Chairman then closed the meeting, having thanked everyone for their work during the year and their attendance.

(Signed) D. E. SNOWDON,
Chairman.