

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 19 August 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Tait (Chair), Allen, Cossins, Mrs Culley, B Jones, McCollom, Wallis and Willis

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bartch and Donoghue,

ABSENT – Councillors Haszeldine

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Keir

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mike Crawshaw (Head of Leisure and Cultural Services), Seth Pearson (Partnership Director), Tom Bryant (Head of Transport, Tees Valley Combined Authority), Sarah Small (Darlington Partnership Programme Officer), Andrew Casey (Head of Highway Network Management) and Hannah Fay (Democratic Officer)

CLS9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS10 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON :-

(1) 17 JUNE 2021

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June be approved as a correct record.

(2) 25 JUNE 2021

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 June 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 25 June be approved as a correct record.

CLS11 TEES VALLEY COMBINED AUTHORITY TRANSPORT UPDATE

The Head of Transport, Tees Valley Combined Authority, gave a presentation (previously circulated) providing Members with a Transport update.

The presentation outlined the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) vision and objectives; details were provided of the STP themes; and there were 32 high-level actions and interventions identified in the STP, with good progress being made against these actions. Members requested further details of the performance framework used to monitor progress.

Details were provided of progress against the STP themes; National Rail, Major Roads, Connecting Centres, Unlocking Key Sites, Local Journeys and Social Equality and Environment; and the delivery of actions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Particular reference was made in respect of progress for improved national rail services; a collaborative response had been submitted to the East Coast Mainline May 2022 proposals, with a further announcement imminent; and that this would be shared with Members.

Discussion and challenge ensued on the progress of the Darlington Northern Link Road; Members were informed that an outline business case had been completed and various funding opportunities were being considered to progress the scheme. The Portfolio Holder for Local Services assured Members that this was a priority.

Particular discussion ensued on the bus service in Darlington. Members felt that the buses were unreliable; that the information for customers at bus stops was inadequate and outdated; and that the online app was not user friendly. The Head of Transport confirmed that a new national bus strategy had been published; that the local transport authority would be pursuing an enhanced partnership with bus operators to deliver bus service improvement via five key areas; decarbonization, service delivery, infrastructure, fares and improving customer experience. The Tees Flex service was in place for a contract term of three years at a cost of £1M per year, with 9 vehicles providing a service across the Tees Valley to address gaps in the network. Members requested details of costing per passenger and it was proposed that Arriva be invited to a future meeting of this Scrutiny to discuss operational issues in Darlington.

Reference was made to the future funding including the future devolved budget; Members were advised of the announcement of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement; and that over £27M of additional funding had been secured in 2020/21, with an additional investment of £500M being sought for major schemes including Darlington Station.

Following a question in respect of the transport options for the night time economy; the Head of Highway Network Management advised members that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham was aware of the issues raised and had identified a number of proposals to address these, including night time buses and taxi marshals; further information would be provided to Members when available.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Head of Transport, Tees Valley Combined Authority for his informative and interesting presentation.

CLS12 PLAYING PITCH AND FACILITIES STRATEGY

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that Members give consideration to the updated Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategy (also previously circulated), prior to its consideration at Cabinet on 7 September 2021.

It was reported that the Sports Facilities Strategy which was previously published in 2014 had been updated to give consideration to the indoor and outdoor sports facilities; set out the strategic direction and site-specific priorities for the future delivery of sports facilities across

the Borough until 2031; and the strategy would remain a valid document for the period 2021-2025.

Reference was made to the significant improvement and investments as a result of the existing playing pitch and sports facilities strategy. Details were also provided of the vision of the strategy; key drivers for the strategy refresh; and that an updated project action plan would be used to monitor the delivery of required actions.

Discussion ensued in respect of the provision of play and street sports facilities, including but not limited to bike tracks and skate parks; Members recognised the requirement for a strategy to oversee these facilities. In addressing Members concern regarding the condition of a number of pitches across the town, the Head of Culture informed Members that the strategy would focus on a hierarchy of facilities, prioritising strategic hub sites; that £70K of equipment had been received from the FA to maintain the pitches at two hub sites; and that the Council would continue to maintain single pitches.

Discussion also ensued in respect of funding opportunities; Members proposed that the Covid Funding could be used towards the provision and improvement of sports facilities in Darlington; and Members also made reference to the lack of clarity within the Strategy in respect of disabled sports provision in Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That be Cabinet be advised of this Scrutiny's view that:

- (i) consideration should be given to the introduction of a Street Sports and Play Strategy.
- (ii) consideration should be given to the utilisation of the Covid Funding towards the provision and improvement of sports facilities in Darlington.
- (iii) a paragraph be included in the Strategy, providing clear, explicit information in respect of the disabled sports provision in Darlington.

CLS13 LIBRARY SERVICES

The Head of Culture provided Members with an update in relation to the refurbishment of Crown Street Library to restore, improve and modernise the library.

Reference was made to the challenges in respect of the roof works, due to the location of the building; that the design and tender process for the scaffold would be complete by October; the works to the library would be finalised by October 2022; and that the costs were still within the agreed budget.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

CLS14 THE NORTHGATE INITIATIVE

The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the

current position and developments of the Northgate Initiative.

It was reported that the Northgate Initiative, which was established in 2019, comprised of a multi-agency programme which sought to pilot a range of interventions in order to improve outcomes for local residents; and that the workstreams aligned with a local framework for wellbeing indicator set that had been developed by ONS, Public Health England and What Works Centre for Wellbeing and Happy City.

The submitted report stated that there had been some measurable improvements over the past 18 months; that momentum was building as the pandemic restrictions were being lifted; and details were provided of the workstream achievements to date in respect of environment, crime and security, housing, economy, childhood and education, health and shaping places for healthier lives.

Following questions, Members were advised of the intention to implement the methodology and learning from this initiative in other wards where required; the importance of community engagement in achieving the objectives of the initiative; that work being undertaken to set timescales for outcomes; and Members welcomed the possibility that further empty properties in the ward could be purchased and refurbished as part of the initiative.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That Members look forward to receiving an update at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

CLS15 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 4 2020/2021

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against those key performance indicators within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee for the period 2020/21.

It was reported that of the 27 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee 18 were reported six monthly at nine were reported annually.

The submitted report gave the performance position in relation to the 27 indicators, of which seven were showing performance better than the same period last year or from when last reported, four indicators were showing performance the same, whilst ten indicators were showing performance not as good as the same period last year or from when last reported; and that six indicators had not been reported due to the coronavirus restrictions.

RESOLVED – That the submitted report be noted.

CLS16 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously approved work programme.

RESOLVED – That the current status of the work programme be noted.