

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 7 April 2022

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

APOLOGIES – Councillors Wallis and Willis

ABSENT – Councillor Haszeldine

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Mrs H Scott (Leader of the Council) and Keir

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Mike Crawshaw (Head of Leisure and Cultural Services), Suzy Hill (Library Manager), Seth Pearson (Partnership Director), Sarah Small (Darlington Partnership Programme Officer) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

CLS37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS38 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2022

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 17 February 2022.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 17 February 2022 be approved as a correct record.

CLS39 PUBLIC SECTOR EXECUTIVE GROUP

The Director, Darlington Partnership submitted a report (previously circulated) informing Members of the work of the Public Sector Executive Group (PSEG).

It was reported that the PSEG was formed following agreement at Council on 15 July as one of the arrangements that replaced the Darlington Partnership; the PSEG included a range of senior officers from key public sector bodies; and reference was made to the key aims of the PSEG.

Details were provided of the projects and organisations supported by the group; the Director of Darlington Partnership acts as the programme/project lead together with support from the Policy and Performance Manager; and the group was Chaired by the Council's Chief Executive. Members noted that the PSEG was financially supported by partners and that the group has no decision making authority.

Reference was made to the recent activity of the group which included consideration of social value through procurement; providing comments on the Levelling Up Darlington

proposal; and acting as a forum to share issues and pressures resulting from the pandemic and to discuss solutions.

Discussion ensued regarding frequency and attendance for the PSEG; and following a question, the Director, Darlington Partnership informed Members that work was progressing to establish the Stronger Communities Board.

RESOLVED – That the report be received for information.

CLS40 THE NORTHGATE INITIATIVE

The Director, Darlington Partnership submitted a report (previously circulated) summarising the current position and developments of the Northgate Initiative.

It was reported that the Northgate Initiative was a multi-agency programme established in 2019, piloting a range of interventions to improve outcomes for local residents in all areas of wellbeing including economy, education and childhood, health, environment and social relationships.

It was also reported that there had been some measurable improvements over the past 2 years working towards the targets set for 2024; that as the restrictions of the pandemic were lifted community engagement had been developed through face to face workings; and details were provided of the workstream achievements to date.

Particular reference was made to the Environment Crime Co-ordinator who was now in post delivering on a back lanes project with the aim of cleaner waste free back lanes; that £298,918 had been secured from the Home Office Safer Streets funding to introduce target-hardening; and there had been a five per cent decrease in calls relating to ‘concern for safety’ for Northgate for March 2021 to February 2022 when compared to the same period in the previous year.

Members were informed that the number of empty properties in the ward had decreased from 177 in December 2019 to 150 in March 2022; that four properties had been bought by the Council as part of the Next Steps projects, these had been renovated and were online as an extension to the current homelessness pathway; and the number of properties in the ward with an EPC rating of F or G had decreased from 148 in December 2019 to 84 in December 2021.

Reference was made to the Community Information Hub which would be located at Corporation Road Primary; that the PCN were working on a Wellbeing service which would have a significant focus on the Northgate ward; and a data dashboard had been implemented to help analyse the impact of the Northgate initiative and identify any gaps.

Following a question, Members were informed that the police had seen an increase in residents engaging in the ward; that housing were working with private landlords in respect of empty properties; and the community information hub would help to improve engagement with residents in the ward.

RESOLVED – That the report be received for information and comment.

CLS41 DARLINGTON HIPPODROME

The Head of Culture and Heritage gave a PowerPoint presentation (previously circulated) on Darlington Hippodrome, updating Members on the theatre's re-emergence following the easing of Covid restrictions.

It was reported that between March 2020 and Autumn 2021 the theatre had applied for and secured £1.7M of funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund; this enabled staff to be retained, overheads to be paid and ensured a programme of theatre, cinema and engagement activities was in place in the Autumn of 2021.

Reference was made to the Hippodrome Team who had ensured that the theatre remained operational and open to the public; that the response from the public had been unprecedented and saw the theatre have the most successful Christmas period in the last ten years.

Details were provided of the community engagement opportunities which included weekly classes for adults and young people, the Mayors Charity Gala, an exhibition in partnership with Northern School of Art, and weekly drop in sessions for Daisy Chain to support families who have received a diagnosis of autism for their child.

Reference was made to the impacts of Covid on the industry; and details were provided of the theatre's charitable fund, A place for everyone which had enabled 1,128 theatre experiences for young people and community groups, visits by 25 Darlington Schools and supported students with a bursary place for the Theatre's Contemporary Dance classes. Additional support had been received from the National Lottery, with £16k for a 241 offer as part of Love Your Local Theatre.

Members were informed of the upcoming shows at the Hippodrome and the Hullabaloo; and ticket sales in the recovery period were outlined.

Discussion ensued regarding opening hours for the bar in the Hippodrome; and options to address anticipated reduction in ticket sales as a result of increased living costs, which included an extension of the 241 offer and a range of ticket prices.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Head of Culture and Heritage for his informative and interesting presentation.

CLS42 DARLINGTON LIBRARIES

The Library Manager gave a PowerPoint presentation (previously circulated) on Darlington Libraries and in doing so updated Members on the progression of the renovation work.

It was reported that the external scaffolding had been erected and work was progressing on the roof; internal scaffolding had also been erected and work was progressing on the adult and junior lending libraries and the reference library; work included new lighting, installation of wifi, redecoration, cleaning of glass lights and cleaning and treatment of shelving units.

The presentation provided internal photos of the reception area and adult lending library; and graphics for the renovated adult lending library and reference library with reference made to the layout and facilities.

The library was offering a limited service during the work, however most services were being maintained on a smaller scale with popular stock available in a condensed area and a free select and collect service offering access to all stock on request. The Centre for Local Studies remained open and the Art Gallery had been transformed into a space for children's activities. Free deliveries were available to people 60 and over and the branch library remained open part time with children's activities taking place outside of opening hours.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Library Manager for her informative and interesting presentation.

CLS43 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance 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 be included in the previously approved work programme.

Members suggested that updates be provided to this Scrutiny Committee on the Public Space Protection Order for Darlington Town Centre, dog fouling and the Stronger Communities Board and its sub groups.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.