

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24 August 2023

PRESENT – Councillors McGill (Chair), Coe, Cossins, Mrs Culley, Garner, Keir, Mahmud, M Nicholson and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillor Snedker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors McCollom, Holroyd and Robinson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Stephen Wiper (Creative Darlington Manager) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

CLS7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS8 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 22 JUNE 2023

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 22 June 2023.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 22 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

CLS9 DARLINGTON CULTURAL STRATEGY ACTION PLAN FOR 2023/2024

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on progress delivering the priorities in the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 and the 2022/23 Action Plan and for Members to consider the Action Plan for 2023/24 (also previously circulated).

It was reported that the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 was approved in 2022/23, with a commitment to submit annual Action Plans for consideration by Scrutiny Members; reference was made to the definition of Culture being used for the strategy and the areas covered; details were provided of the vision of the strategy; and the five priorities which the strategy seeks to address between 2022 and 2026 were outlined.

The submitted report provided details of the progress made in 2022/23 in addressing priorities and reference was made to the action plan for 2023/24.

Members raised questions regarding the impact of the cost of living crisis and the cessation of 2 hour free parking offer on events; Members were informed that whilst there had been a reduction in advanced bookings, there was a good level of secondary spend at the Hippodrome and that the town centre offer provided a good mix of provisions including a wide range of free events; and the impact in relation to the end of the parking offer was not yet known.

Members queried role of the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway (Friends of S&DR) in relation to the priority 'Develop the content of the 2025 bi-centenary programme proposal'; Members were informed that the Friends of S&DR were heavily involved, were members on the executive group and board, and that this had been an omission and the Plan would be amended accordingly to include them as a partner. Discussion also ensued regarding funding streams.

A Member of public in attendance at the meeting highlighted a number of concerns on behalf of the Friends of S&DR in relation to historical accuracy for the bicentenary. The Assistant Director Community Services assured Members that advice and the views of the Friends of S&DR was considered alongside the views of other partners and experts that were involved and highlighted the importance of compromise to ensure that the bicentenary offer appealed to everyone.

RESOLVED – (a) That the progress on the 2022/23 Action Plan be noted.

(b) That the Action Plan for 2023/24 be noted.

CLS10 CONSULTATION ON RENEWAL OF DOG PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking Members views on the renewal of the Dog Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) as part of the consultation process.

The submitted report stated that the current dog PSPO was introduced on 31 January 2021 and was due to lapse on 31 January 2024; as part of a review on the possible extension of the order, a statutory period of consultation was approved by Cabinet on 3 July 2023 based on the existing order; and the outcome of the consultation and would be considered at a future meeting of Cabinet.

It was reported that whilst the majority of dog owners and walkers behaved responsibly, dog related anti-social behaviour was a concern to some residents, businesses and visitors; a PSPO was designed to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in an area; and the areas covered by the dog PSPO were outlined.

Members were informed of the fines issued since the PSPO's came into force; noted that the responsibility for renewing existing PSPO's rested with the Council; that consultation must take place with the local police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the owners and occupiers of any land included in the PSPO and wider consultation with representatives from the local community; and an 8 week consultation process commenced in July. Members also noted the fines relating to failure to comply with a PSPO and that any PSPO introduced would be for a three year period.

Discussion ensued regarding the permissance of dogs in cemeteries; and following concerns raised in relation to the enforcement of offences, Members were informed of the staffing levels for enforcement and that enforcement was intel led. Members queried the use of the Report It app to report concerns relating to dogs and highlighted the need for updated signage in certain public spaces to align with the PSPO.

RESOLVED – That, as part of the consultation process, Cabinet be advised that this Committee supports the renewal of the existing Dog Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) on the proviso that the consultation process does not identify a requirement for amendments to the PSPO.

CLS11 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 4 2022/23

The Assistant Director Community Services and Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators at Quarter 4 2022/23.

It was reported that of the 35 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 25 were reported six monthly.

The submitted report gave the performance position in relation to the 35 indicators, of which 19 had increased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported, whilst 16 had decreased when compared to the same period last year or from when last reported.

Members entered into discussion regarding recycling; Members were assured that whilst recycling performance had decreased, the Council were meeting requirements for recycling; that food waste mandated collection would be implemented in 2026 following the commencement of the new waste contract; and that a range of activities had been undertaken to encourage recycling, including advertisement on bin wagons and youtube videos.

Members also discussed fly tipping, highlighting concern regarding the low number of prosecutions, and requested further information regarding fines for successful prosecutions; concerns were also raised regarding bus punctuality and Members were informed of work being done with the provider, including £3M investment in new vehicles and support with driver recruitment.

Discussion ensued regarding road traffic accidents and it was suggested Members be provided with further information for low level accidents to identify potential trends; and following a question, Members were provided with details of the road maintenance programme.

RESOLVED – That the content of the submitted report be noted.

CLS12 STRONGER COMMUNITIES FUND

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with information on the spend and use of the Stronger Communities Fund during the 2022/2023 financial year.

The submitted report stated that Cabinet agreed the establishment of the Stronger

Communities Fund in April 2021, allocating each Councillor £1,000 to deliver the objectives of the fund; and reference was made to the final spend against the £50,000 for the 2022/2023 financial year, together with information on what had been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis.

It was reported that this Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 12 January 2023, supported the continuation of the pilot scheme in the 2023/24 financial year; reference was made to the agreement which members were required to enter into regarding the use of the funds; and that the agreement for 2023/24 specifically required Members to consider whether the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Members applies and to declare any potential declarations of interest within the signed agreement.

A question was raised in relation to monitoring the advertisement of the fund by Members and Members highlighted the need for greater general awareness of the fund; and concerns were raised regarding Members declarations of pecuniary interest.

RESOLVED – (a) That the final spend against the £50,000 for the 2022/2023 financial year be noted.

(b) That the Stronger Communities Fund be advertised in the One Darlington Magazine.

(c) That the Monitoring Officer reviews the final spend for 2022/23 for any undeclared pecuniary interests.

CLS13 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.

Discussion ensued regarding a number of items on the work programme; Members agreed to the removal of Open Spaces Groups and Hippodrome; agreed to the addition of Tees Valley Combined Authority Transport Committee minutes; requested a yearly review of the Tree and Woodland Strategy; and a verbal update on the camera replacement programme. It was also suggested that an update on the heritage action zone be included as part of the Rail Heritage Quarter update scheduled for the next meeting of this scrutiny committee.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be updated to reflect discussions.