

COUNCIL
30 SEPTEMBER 2021

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Transport Update

2. Scrutiny welcomed a PowerPoint presentation from the Head of Transport, Tees Valley Combined Authority, updating Members on the progress against the actions in the Strategic Transport Plan (STP).
3. Members were provided with details of the STP vision, objectives and themes, and progress updates were provided for the STP themes of National Rail, Major Roads, Connecting Centres, Unlocking Key Sites, Local Journeys and Social Equality and Environment.
4. Members were disappointed in the progress of the Darlington Northern Link Road scheme, but were given assurances that various funding opportunities were being considered to progress the scheme.
5. 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 Members felt that the buses were unreliable, that the information for customers at bus stops was inadequate and outdated and that the online app was not user friendly. We acknowledged that the local transport authority would be pursuing an enhanced partnership with bus operators to deliver bus service improvement via five key areas; decarbonisation, service delivery, infrastructure, fares and improving customer experience. Members welcomed the proposal that Arriva be invited to a future meeting of this Scrutiny to discuss operational issues in Darlington.
6. We also raised concern in respect of the transport options for the night time economy. We were pleased to note that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham was aware of the issues raised and has identified a number of proposals to address these, including night time buses and taxi marshals. We look forward to receiving further updates.

Playing Pitch and Facilities Strategy

7. Scrutiny Committee received a report seeking Members' view and feedback on the Playing Pitch and Facilities Strategy prior to its consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 7 September 2021.
8. The Sports Facilities Strategy which was previously published in 2014 had been updated to give consideration to the indoor and outdoor sports facilities and sets out the strategic direction and site-specific priorities for the future delivery of sports facilities across the Borough until 2031.

9. Scrutiny raised concern regarding the condition of a number of pitches across the town and we were informed that the strategy would focus on a hierarchy of facilities, prioritising strategic hub sites and that £70K of equipment had been received from the FA to maintain the pitches at two hub sites. We acknowledged that the Council would continue to maintain single pitches across the town.
10. Members requested that Cabinet give consideration to the introduction of a Street Sports and Play Strategy; consideration to the utilisation of the Covid Funding towards the provision and improvement of sports facilities in Darlington; and that a paragraph be included in the Strategy, providing clear, explicit information in respect of the disabled sports provision in Darlington.

Library Services

11. Scrutiny welcomed an update from the Head of Culture and Heritage on the refurbishment of Crown Street Library, noting the challenges faced in relation to the roof works, due to the location of the building.
12. We were advised of the timescales for the works to the library and were pleased to note that the costs remain within the agreed budget.

Northgate Initiative

13. Scrutiny received a report outlining the current position and developments of the Northgate Initiative, a multi-agency programme established in 2019 which seeks to pilot a range of interventions in order to improve outcomes for local residents.
14. Scrutiny were informed that there have been some measurable improvements over the past 18 months 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.
15. Members noted the intention to implement the methodology and learning from this initiative in other wards and welcomed the possibility that further empty properties in the ward could be purchased and refurbished as part of the initiative.

Performance Indicators – Quarter 4 2020/2021

16. Scrutiny Committee received an update on Quarter 4 performance against key performance indicators for 2020/2021 which are within the remit of our Scrutiny.
17. We gave consideration to the performance position in relation to the 27 indicators, noting that 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.

18. Members were pleased to receive the additional performance indicators in relation to the Hippodrome digital engagement, education and outreach.

Work Programme 2021/22

19. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Councillor Steven Tait
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee