

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 9 June 2022

**PRESENT** – Councillors Tait (Chair), Allen, Bartch, Bell, Cossins, Mrs Culley, Haszeldine, McCollom and Willis

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Donoghue and Wallis,

**ABSENT** – Councillors

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors Renton and Keir

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Chris Knox (Community Safety Programme Manager), Colin Dobson (Licensing Manager) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

### **CLS1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23**

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Tait be appointed Chair of this Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

### **CLS2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23**

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Donoghue be appointed Vice-Chair of this Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

### **CLS3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### **CLS4 TO CONSIDER THE TIMES OF MEETINGS OF THIS COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23 ON THE DATES AGREED IN THE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS BY CABINET AT MINUTE C100/FEB/22**

**RESOLVED** – That two of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee be held in the evening and that the remainder of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee in the 2022/23 Municipal Year be held at 10.00am on the dates, as agreed on the calendar of meetings by Cabinet at Minute C100/Feb/22.

### **CLS5 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 7 APRIL 2022**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 7 April 2022.

Discussion ensued on Members' attendance.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 7 April 2022 be approved as a correct record.

## **CLS6 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER - DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE**

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking Members' views on the renewal of the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the Town Centre, prior to its consideration at Cabinet on 22 June 2022, as part of the consultation process for the introduction of the renewal of the town centre PSPO.

It was reported that the PSPO was granted for Darlington Town Centre in 2019 to assist in dealing with issues such as nuisance behaviour, begging and anti-social drinking; that the PSPO expired in February 2022; and that the renewal of the PSPO could assist the Council, Police and partners in dealing with some of the ongoing issues.

The submitted report stated that PSPOs were a key element of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 which came into force in October 2014; the responsibility for making a new PSPO rests with the Council; and an eight-week consultation exercise took place from 7 March 2022 to 2 May 2022, with reference made to the responses received in relation to the consultation.

Details were provide of the draft order (also previously circulated) and the restrictions of this PSPO; that if introduced, a new PSPO would be for another three year period. Reference was also made to the police figures for the town centre (also previously circulated) and the benefits of the town centre PSPO were highlighted.

Following concerns raised regarding arrangements to address youth nuisance, the Community Safety Programme Manager advised Members that the a range of tools were in place, this included Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and that the aim of the PSPO was to prevent the escalation of antisocial behaviour before it becomes criminal. Reference was made to the work of the Begging Working Group to in relation to fixed penalty notices issued to beggars.

Discussion ensued in relation to the effectiveness of fines; engagement with multi-agency partners; and the trends relating to youth related anti-social behaviour.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That Cabinet be advised that the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee support the renewal of the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the Town Centre.

(b) That an update be provided to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

## **CLS7 STRONGER COMMUNITIES FUND**

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members with information on the spend and use of the Stronger Communities Fund during the 2021/2022 financial year.

In introducing the report the Stronger Communities Portfolio Holder advised Members that there had been good use of the fund, with only £2,116.50 of the £50,000 remaining unspent.

The submitted report stated that following the establishment of the Stronger Communities Fund, each Councillor was allocated £1,000; were required to enter into an agreement with the Council regarding the use of the funds; and reference was made to the final spend against the £50,000 for the 2021/2022 financial year, together with information on what had been delivered in wards on an individual Councillor basis and details of paperwork received to date (also previously circulated).

It was reported that this Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 6 January 2022, supported the continuation of the pilot scheme in the 2022/23 financial year; that the process for administering the scheme for the 2022/23 financial year had been reviewed following feedback from Members, Officers and the Credit Union; and the updated administration process was outlined, with Members noting that all of the funding for 2022/23 must be given to the grant recipient by 24 March 2023.

Questions were raised in relation to those Members that did not spend their fund in 2021/22; the possibility of allocating the unspent funds from 2021/22; and it was suggested that training be provided for Members to identify and access other funding opportunities to help local projects and community groups.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the final spend against the £50,000 for the 2021/2022 financial year be noted.

(b) That the use of the Fund during the 2021/22 financial year be noted.

(c) That the administration process for the fund in the 2022/23 financial year be noted.

#### **CLS8 STRONGER COMMUNITIES BOARD AND SUB GROUPS - UPDATE**

**RESOLVED** – That an update be provided by the Stronger Communities Portfolio Holder at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

#### **CLS9 TAXIS IN DARLINGTON**

The Licensing Manager provided Members with an update on the current position regarding taxis in Darlington.

Members were provided with details of the number of licenced vehicles in Darlington, and that of the 232 vehicles, 11 were wheelchair accessible; and reference was made to the changes to the requirements regarding emission standards for vehicles.

It was reported that the authority had seen a reduction in 109 drivers when compared to pre-covid; details were provided of the four operators in the town; the demand for drivers was highest for the night time economy; and taxi marshals had been introduced to address disorder in the taxi queues, with funding in place to September. Members noted the increase in taxi fares on 12 April 2022.

Members were informed that a best practice guide was last published by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2006; the Council's Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy 2021 was out for consultation; and a meeting held with the Trade in April 2022 identified a

number of changes to the Council's policy that would support the trade and increase recruitment of drivers, including removal of vehicle age and window tint restrictions and removal of the requirement for a knowledge locality test for private hire.

Members were informed that changes to requirements for the registration of taxi drivers with HMRC had resulted in the loss of five drivers in Darlington; the Council was awaiting public guidance on the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act which received royal ascent in April; the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) bill was out for consultation; and the Council's online taxi licensing system was due to be implemented on 1 August.

Members expressed disappointment in relation to the availability of taxis for the night time economy in Darlington; the Licensing Manager informed Members that this was a national problem and changes to the Council's policy sought to address this.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the update be noted.

(b) That Members receive an update at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

#### **CLS10 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 for the Municipal Year 2022/23 and to consider any additional areas to be included.

A discussion was held in respect of the current items on the work programme and a number of new items were proposed; these included Open Spaces Groups, Darlington Transport Strategy, Darlington Parking Strategy and Town Centre Parking Strategy.

**RESOLVED** – That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.