

COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 2023

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.

Darlington Cultural Strategy Action Plan for 2023/24

2. Scrutiny welcomed an update on the progress in relation to the delivery of the priorities in the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 and the 2022/23 Action Plan. We also gave our consideration to the Action Plan for 2023/24.
3. We were provided with details of the progress made in 2022/23 and considered the Action Plan for 2023/24.
4. Members raised questions regarding the impact of the cost of living crisis and the cessation of 2 hour free parking offer on events. We acknowledged that there had been a reduction in advanced bookings however there was a good level of secondary spend at the Hippodrome and the town centre offer provided a good mix of provisions including a wide range of free events.
5. We queried the level of involvement of the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway and were informed that as members of the executive group and board, they had significant role. Concerns were raised by a member of public in attendance at the meeting on in relation to historical accuracy for the bicentenary. Members were assured that the views and advice provided by the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway were considered alongside the views of other partners and experts for the bicentenary offer.

Consultation on Renewal of Dog Public Space Protection Order (PSPO)

6. Scrutiny received a report seeking the views of this Scrutiny Committee on the renewal of the dog PSPO as part of the consultation process.
7. Particular concerns were raised in relation to the enforcement of offences and Members were informed of the staffing levels for enforcement and that enforcement was intel led. We also 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.
8. Members requested that, as part of the consultation process, Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny 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.

Performance Indicators Quarter 4 2022/23

9. Scrutiny received an update on Quarter 4 performance against key performance indicators for 2022/23.
10. We gave consideration to the performance position in relation to the 35 indicators, noting that 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.
11. We discussed in particular recycling and were assured that whilst recycling performance had decreased, the Council were meeting requirements for recycling, noted 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.
12. We also discussed fly tipping, highlighting concern regarding the low number of prosecutions, and requested further information regarding fines for successful prosecutions. We also raised concerns regarding bus punctuality and Members were informed of work being done with the provider in Darlington.
13. Members discussed key performance indicators related to the library service and whether they were still appropriate as Crown Street Library reopened after refurbishment. Members discussed the need to collect data on the socio-economic background of library users, to ensure that the service had a broad range of users. The appropriate Cabinet Member agreed to look at ways to monitor this information.

Stronger Communities Fund Update

14. Scrutiny received a report providing Members with an update on the spend and use of the Stronger Communities Fund for the 2022/23 financial year. We noted that there had been good use of the fund, with £3465.02 of the £50,000 remaining unspent.
15. We noted that the agreement for 2023/24 has been updated to specifically require 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.
16. We have requested that the fund be advertised in the One Darlington magazine to improve general awareness of the fund with the public and we have requested that the Monitoring Officer reviews the final spend for 2022/23 for any undeclared pecuniary interests.

Work Programme 2023/24

17. We have given consideration to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the Municipal Year 2023/24 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Councillor James McGill
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee