

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 October 2013

Present: Councillor S Graham (Chair)
Councillors J Allan, A Cowie, S Day, M Finlay,
John Hunter, P Mason, D McGarr, P McIntyre,
A McMullen, T Mulvenna, M Rankin and J Walker

School Governor Representatives
Mrs M Ord,
Mrs J Little

Church Representatives
Rev Vine

Others in attendance
Councillor E Darke,

OV28/10/13 Apologies

Apologies for absence was received from Councillors B Burdis, Marian Huscroft and L Miller

OV29/10/13 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the appointment of the following substitute Members was reported:-

Councillor T Mulvenna for Councillor B Burdis
Councillor M Finlay for Cllr Marian Huscroft

OV30/10/13 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

OV31/10/13 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 2 September 2013 be confirmed.

OV32/10/13 Leisure, Culture and Tourism – Cabinet portfolio

Councillor E Darke – Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Tourism attended the meeting.

He stated that his portfolio responsibilities were to protect and promote the cultural and artistic heritage, help businesses and communities to grow and make North Tyneside a borough of choice in the region.

That cultural activities provide a range of positive outcomes for the residents and communities of North Tyneside including a sense of identity, belonging, social and community cohesion.

The range of customer facing services that benefit individual people and local communities in terms of improving health and wellbeing, include, Sport & Leisure, Parks & Allotments and Cultural Services

The services support lifelong learning, tourism, local economy and improved health and wellbeing and facilities were fully accessible to all sections of the community.

Examples provided were:

- Sport North Tyneside with the aim to increase participation of disabled people in sport by offering a variety of inclusive and disability specific sporting opportunities for all.
- Shiremoor Adventure Playground providing activities for children & young people aged 0 to 25 and was a key facility for children & young people with a range of disabilities and their families.
- The Arts Development team identifying ways in which the arts engage with communities and neighbourhood groups.
- Working with partners in the most deprived areas to provide activities and events that engage children, young people and their families.

Within the portfolio area Libraries, Allotments and Archives were the only services which North Tyneside Council was required to deliver by law and all other services were therefore discretionary.

Councillor Darke detailed a summary of performance, key achievements and areas of investment in the cultural offer.

The budget priorities for the portfolio area 2014/15 had a Change Efficiency and Improvement target of £1.097m and would lead to the:

- Review of the library offer to reflect changing usage and ensure that services were sustainable going forward. Review of management and support structures.
- Review to what is done and how to achieve efficiencies whilst endeavouring to deliver high quality services, activities, events and programmes to residents and visitors.
- Increase of appropriate charges to maximise income.
- Review other charges to generate additional income
- Maximising the use/potential use of facilities.
- Identifying of opportunities to generate additional income through commissioning, traded services and grant funding

Questions were directed to Councillor E Darke in relation to playsite and allotment provision and fees & charges. In response the Committee were made aware that playsites and allocations of allotments would be provided where and when appropriate sites were identified and when allotments became vacant. The level of fees and charges would be placed at a level that would match the market with consideration made to private and neighbouring providers.

With regards to the archived art works, it was asked if there were plans to promote and display the art the Council owned. It was explained that a good amount of the Council's art was already being exhibited in its buildings. However with respect to the art held in its archive it was highlighted that costs of restoration would need to be considered for some before being placed on display.

A Member asked for the position of the review of the library offer. The Committee was informed that no decisions would be made with regards to the library offer until a full review was complete and that the Environment and Culture Sub Committee was to complete some work to aid the review.

The Chair thanked Councillor E Darke for the briefing on his portfolio responsibility.

Agreed that the briefing on the portfolio area – Leisure, Tourism and Culture be noted.

OV33/10/13 Community Engagement Sub-group Report

The Committee received a report from the Community Engagement Sub-group that had been established by Overview and Scrutiny Committee to contribute to the development of a new community engagement strategy.

The Committee was reminded that since Area Forums had terminated in April 2013, there was a need to develop new ways of engaging with residents with a focus on ward level engagement.

The key principle was that Ward councillors needed to take a lead in ward level engagement and that officers should be there to support them in their community leadership role. It was emphasised that feedback to residents should always take place following consultations, which would have a positive impact on keeping people engaged.

It was acknowledged that resources were limited and there were no individual ward budgets. However, it was noted that there was a budget available that would enable ward level meetings to take place.

The sub-group identified 11 recommendations aimed to help to develop and establish successful ward engagement and support for Councillors.

A Member raised the appropriateness to the suggestion that the agenda for the first phase of ward level meetings should include an update to the actions undertaken on the issue of flooding. It was stated that not all wards had been affected by flooding. Another Member stated that flooding was an issue for the whole Borough giving an example on how the gully cleaning programme would help incidents of potential flooding.

A Member raised the concern that meetings had been arranged by the Council and partner organisations with residents to discuss issues, however the Ward Councillors had not been invited to attend. It was also raised that the social media 'Twitter' would benefit residents to get in touch with their Councillor and it was stated that the Councillor twitter address should be allowed to be placed on the Councillor page of the Council website.

The Chair informed the Committee that alternative means of engaging people had been looked at and that a new Communications Strategy was currently under development which would include an approach to social media.

Agreed that (1) Officers work with Ward Councillors to ensure there is a clear feedback mechanism in place for all forms of ward level engagement;

(2) Officers in North Tyneside Homes review Area Housing Forums where positive outcomes are not being met and work with Ward Councillors and tenants to identify a replacement that contributes to the ward engagement model, focusing on wards and issues local to residents;

(3) As part of the estate based working review, estate walkabouts are refreshed or replaced. This will produce a greater involvement from Ward Councillors and a focus on improving neighbourhood standards for all residents;

(4) Officers ensure that appropriate mechanisms and support be put in place to ensure that Ward Councillors are able to build closer links with young people through attendance at school council meetings;

(5) The Participation and Engagement Team liaise with the Policy, Performance and Research Team to ensure that information is included in Members Briefings in relation to youth engagement and participation;

(6) All Ward Councillors, in conjunction with local residents and officers, set the agendas for ward level meetings within their area;

(7) As a minimum guideline, each ward holds a meeting on a quarterly basis and arranges additional events as required to meet demand;

(8) Where agreeable amongst Ward Councillors, the ward level meetings operate on a 'revolving chair' basis to allow all Ward Councillors to fulfil their role as a community leader and develop the necessary skills required;

(9) Action plans be developed for each ward forum which highlight 3 priorities for that area and allow the activities of each forum to be coordinated appropriately;

(10) The task and finish group established to develop the website give priority to the inclusion of tools that will allow greater interaction and engagement with residents; and

(11) That the work currently being undertaken in relation to Ward Councillor communications recognise the new role for Ward Councillors in delivering ward level meetings and prioritise ways to improve access to clear, concise and up-to-date information.

OV34/10/13 Work Programme

The Committee received a report that provided an update to the delivery of the 2013/14 work programme.

Detailed was the work that had been undertaken and ongoing for Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-committees.

The Committee was asked to consider the topics selected for in-depth review in the programme and compare them to the priorities of the new council Plan 'Our North Tyneside' 2014/18 priorities.

A Member raised the concern that some of the work being carried out by the sub-committees would be concluded after the Cabinets initial budget proposals would be agreed. It was suggested that interim reports be submitted in possible with recommendations to allow Cabinet consideration before agreement of the initial budget.

Agreed that (1) the Work Programme report be noted; and (2) interim reports with associated recommendations be submitted to Cabinet to allow consideration before the agreement of the initial budget proposals on the 25 November 2013 where practicable.