

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2021

A MEETING of the COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2021, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Vice-Chair - Councillor Nigel Cannings

Councillors James Church, Gemma Cobby, Julie Grace, Emma Muddiman-Rawlins, Glynis Smith and Gary Stapleton

Cabinet Member: Councillor Mark Houlbrook - Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Waste

Officers:

DMBC

- Vanessa Hoyland-Powell - Well North Manager Health Improvement Team - Public Health
- Karen Lythe - Assistant Director, Housing
- Tim Newton – Sustainability Unit, Economy and Environment

EXTERNAL

- Jon Whiteley - Deputy Chief Executive - Doncaster Cultural Leisure Trust
- Kate Bell - Programme Manager (Social Isolation and Loneliness Alliance) - Doncaster Cultural Leisure Trust

1 **Apologies for absence.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daniel Barwell and Debbie Hutchinson.

2 **To consider the extent, if any, to which the public and press are to be excluded from the meeting.**

None

3 **Declarations of Interest, if any.**

There were no declarations of interest made.

4 **Minutes from the meeting of the Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 19th February 2021**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 19th February 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

5 Public Statements.

There were no public statements made.

6 Social Inclusion and Loneliness Alliance (SIA)

The Panel received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Executive of the Doncaster Cultural Leisure Trust and Well North Manager from the Health Improvement Team - Public Health (DMBC), which updated Members on progress made by the Social Isolation and Loneliness Alliance since November 2019.

The presentation covered the following areas;

- Factors Affecting Loneliness and Social Isolation
- SIA Support in Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Governance/Strategic Framework 2021
- Financial Precip
- Financial Overview 2019-2024
- Precip of Programmes Funded
- Gaps and Moving Forward
- Programme Updates

There was a discussion held and the following areas were highlighted.

Funding – there was a brief conversation around funding, how it had been broken down and what could be made available

Action: A Member requested information on what other projects were being undertaken by Ward. The Senior Governance Officer offered to circulate the presentation and information provided to the Panel.

Success of work undertaken by SIA – Members were informed that based on the measure of sustainability and support from local voluntary groups, communities and faith groups, that the work had been deemed a success, particularly during the lockdown. It was recognised that more work needed to be done about raising advocacy about the work undertaken.

It was added that it would be what was learnt from the research being carried out that would demonstrate other measures of success. Members were informed that such research was taking place with academics from Manchester Metropolitan University as an additional resource to analyse all the data being collated.

It was explained that the Social Inclusion Alliance, was an alliance with around 60 organisations involved that all reported on their work in different ways, which could be a challenge. It was commented that further work was also being undertaken around the social return from the investment that had been made (for example, reduction made in prescriptions).

It was stated that successful engagement had been undertaken with local voluntary community and faith sector groups. It was explained that the research would be able to identify who had been helped and how social inclusion had been addressed. It was acknowledged that loneliness and social isolation was difficult to analyse as it was a subjective issue and this was where the academic research would be beneficial.

Safeguarding – A Member enquired about what safeguards were in place to make sure that those deemed vulnerable had been suitably protected. Members were informed that safeguarding was in place with the Trust from a due diligence perspective, as well as supporting those organisations involved to do so as well. It was added that a number of groups had started up during the pandemic and that the Trust had introduced safeguarding protocols to help embed this as a priority especially in light of issuing certain funding. It was acknowledged that some groups would not have their own procedures in place and the Trust recognised that improvements could also be made in ensuring that this area could be made more robust.

Accessibility of Information - Assurances were also sought that steps were being taken to ensure that questionnaires were available in the appropriate format such as easy read, picture format or appropriate languages. It was recognised that specialist groups were involved within the alliance and the assumption was made that those groups had the appropriate measures in place when communicating with such cohorts.

It was clarified that as part of the alliance, the group was only a member if constituted. Members were informed that other smaller unconstituted organisations or individuals were directed to the Voluntary Action Group and supported through that process. Reference was made to community connectors whose role and expertise also helped to support the best ways to communicate.

Structure – It was explained that in view of the challenging logistics of having 60 members within the alliance, that it had been agreed to form a consortium, which had undertaken one meeting to date. It was added that sub-groups boards were still under development

Governance - Regarding the scrutiny of the alliance, Members were informed that the Trust had to ensure that there was due diligence in place. It was outlined as part of the Trust's lead organisation role, they carry out financial checks and through the applications (in addition to safeguarding checks and sustainability). This was in addition to a further check through the Panel, which had representation from across the different organisations involved. It was continued that where there was uncertainty, further checks would then be made with the applicant. It was acknowledged that although some bids were rejected, a layer of support was provided through the process with certain mechanisms and controls in place. Finally, it was noted that the Council had a role itself in ensuring that the Trust as the lead organisation was compliant.

Transparency – A Member asked whether there was a public register regarding the details of funded amounts so that the public could see what works was being undertaken and amounts being provided. It was explained that it was not currently available, although a Freedom of information (FOI) request could be activated to access such information. Members were assured that once funding had been allocated, there would be a report (which would be made publically available) on the work that had taken place and the amount of funding that had been allocated.

RESOLVED that the Panel note the progress made by the Third Sector Provider Alliance and support the approach going forward.

7 Environmental And Sustainability Strategy - Update

The Panel received an update on activity and next steps in relation to the Environmental and Sustainability Strategy.

There was a discussion and the following areas were highlighted;

Energy Co-operatives – A Member asked what was being undertaken to support residents in building energy co-operatives in Doncaster. Members were informed that there were many different models in terms of supporting the community and energy engagement, which were being considered with this being one of those models. It was explained that there was new capability being brought into the sustainability and energy side (as well as natural environment) unit to take forward this work.

Tree Planting Target – Concern was raised around how the Council was looking to promote its tree planting on private land to help towards its 1 million tree target. It was recognised that this was a particularly high target with large delivery needing to come from private landowners. Reference was made to support available through the likes of partnerships at a South Yorkshire level, local nature partnership, forestry commission and woodland trust, called the South Yorkshire Woodland Creation partnership.

It was added that different funding streams were coming through organisations such as DEFRA, ultimately through the woodland trust and forestry commission. It was outlined that there was active engagement with the forestry commission around some of their activity. An example of this was a leasing scheme aimed at leasing land of 50 hectares for around 60 years or more, making a significant impact to the target. It was explained that currently outside of tree planting season, the Council was actively engaged in preparation work regarding funding streams and the project pipeline. This would involve looking at four elements of Doncaster assets of around 60 hectares, various funding streams currently available and how invitations would be going out to the community, business owners and private landowners who all contribute to the tree target.

A Member raised concern whether this target was realistic and it was responded that emerging climate change reports indicated that substantial ambitions were needed (alongside retrofitting, peatland restoration and other climate change interventions). It was explained that Doncaster formed part of the South Yorkshire Woodland Creation Programme, which provided support and access to funding. Members were also informed that there would be a dedicated post within the new Sustainability Unit that will focus on this area and engaging with private landowners.

Members were also informed of other areas of work such the recent publication of a new national planning framework that would ensure that trees were a requisite of new developments. It was explained that another piece of work was a Natural Capital Assessment for South Yorkshire, led by the Sheffield City Region. This involved assessing Doncaster land, its current performance in terms of capturing carbon or emitting carbon and identifying opportunities areas for biodiversity improvement including tree planting. Members were informed that this would will help guide the

authority to the best location, to enable a dialogue with landowners and start recruiting the private sector in order to meet the objectives.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability raised the issue of addressing behaviour change, such as monitoring individual behaviour as well as tree planting and clarified that this was being picked up in the sustainability unit. It was recognised that this work included all organisations such as schools and businesses. It was noted that consideration had been given to forming a register where private individuals were encouraged to identify areas where they had planted trees and what types of trees they were.

Reference was made to resourcing the trees or saplings in-house. The Natural Environment Officer stated that there was no current plan to have a nursery in-house. It was outlined how community nurseries attract community support and something that could be considered (although questioned whether such a model would itself provide the authority with the bulk that commercial forestry companies could provide). It was acknowledged that there was a need to have supply chain that was reliable and part of a skilled industry as it was recognised that all local authorities were looking to access a large number of trees.

Habitat Banking – A brief explanation was provided about biodiversity net gain. It was outlined how developers needed to provide some indication as to how they will maintain or compensate for biodiversity lost as part of development.

It was explained how biodiversity loss was calculated in units, and development applications needed to show how developers could restore the loss of biodiversity or purchase biodiversity units from a habitat bank to compensate.

Members were told how there was a reluctance for biodiversity loss to be offset remotely and it was recognised that communities needed to connect with what they had lost and what they had gained,

It was commented that dispersing net gain across a community i.e. a tree, grass verge, would mean having multiple sites and therefore difficult to assess in terms of their biodiversity baseline. It was considered that this gave good reason for having habitat banks i.e. sites that were managed, and that there would be a greater biodiversity gain when there was a consolidated habitat. It was noted that the scheme was a pilot for planning colleagues, to find out how biodiversity net gain works best.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability commented that when planning, developers may go onto greenspace and as part of planning considerations, trees were being removed and replaced in that area. It was noted that there were times when developers were unable to fulfil that pledge although considered important when developers do develop, that there was a relationship balance that needed to be applied. It was felt that it was important to watch the responsibilities of planning and developers and that Members were mindful of those regarding applications in their ward areas.

Council Fleet – Members noted that they were pleased to see that the Council's fleet was starting to become increasingly more electric powered including the new bin collectors with an additional 25 vehicles planned this year. It was added that there was a plan to expand further its green fleet over the next few years to match its target of zero emissions. The Assistant Director of Housing concurred how it was important

to change the council vehicles moving forward and this formed a key part of the action planning targets.

Members were informed by the Cabinet Members that new bin lorries were expensive to purchase although not the case to maintain them. It was recognised that the issue was the infrastructure and being able to provide charging points such as within car parks. The Assistant Director advised Members that feasibility work had commenced to consider charging options and a potential pilot scheme involving street charging and using lampposts to charge.

A Member raised concern around areas with roads, which experienced high pollution levels due to having busy roads. It was recognised that there was a synergy between both the air quality and electrification agenda.

Communication and Engagement - The Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Waste updated Members about the work that was being undertaken to promote further engagement with Members through a regular newsletter (that would also be made available to public) along with ongoing achievements. It was also noted that this newsletter would be also made available in the public domain. Further to this, there would also be an environmental surgery and an opportunity to hold a dialogue with officers to share any ideas and concerns.

Overview and Scrutiny Workplan - In terms of the workplan, Officers suggested that the following areas would be worth consideration by scrutiny;

- Retrofitting of Building – it was commented that this was both an area of particular challenge but also a significant area as housing was one of the largest emitter of carbon emissions in the borough.
- Behaviour Changes – key in tackling climate changes and would be good to have a session to mobilise confidence how residents for example, heat their home, vehicle, unlock potential and be reactive
- Flooding preparation - Members were reminded of Flood Planning Preparation that was on the workplan for consideration at its October meeting.
- Sustainability Update - It was suggested that there could be an update on the Environment and Sustainability Strategy around autumn to allow time to mobilise the 111 actions and begin to develop the action plan.

RESOLVED that the Panel note the report and information provided.

8 Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan 2021/22 and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

The Senior Governance Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny work plan and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions. She reminded the Panel that its work for the 2021/22 year was nearly complete and asked Members to give consideration to areas they may wish to address moving forward.

RESOLVED: That the report, be noted.