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ACTIVE AND COHESIVE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 6th September, 2012

Present:- Councillor George Cairns – in the Chair

Councillors Bailey, Cooper, Mrs Cornes, Holland, Lawton, Miss Olszewski, Plant, Miss Walklate, Mrs Williams and Mrs Winfield

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Bannister and Councillor Heesom.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2012 be agreed as a correct record with the addition of Councillor Mrs Cornes' apologies.

4. BATESWOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

The Committee considered a report advising of the working group recommendations regarding requests from the community for additional bridle route provision and use of part of the main pool for fishing in Bateswood Local Nature Reserve.

Members of the working group considered the recommendations excellent. The work undertaken by the working group had been good, and in particular the site visit to Bateswood had been informative. Members not on the working group also considered that the recommendations in the report were the best outcome that could be achieved from the process. However, it was noted that people who were not local might express an interest in managing fishing on the main pool and the Committee agreed that a local club should manage fishing on the main pool.

RESOLVED: (a) That the information be received.

(b) That the working group recommendations be put forward for Cabinet to consider.

5. WORK PLAN

The Committee considered the work plan. Third Sector Commissioning was discussed, as a document had been distributed by the Leader regarding Newcastle Citizens Advice Bureau and there was concern regarding the funding that the CAB had got for Newcastle, in particular funding for the Coalfield Alliance mining wards. It was understood by Members that there was a different pot of money for general work which was what was being commissioned for, and money from coalfield regeneration would not go into that pot; money for mining villages would remain for them. Members noted that the Committee had been positive with regard to commissioning at the previous meeting. This was agreed but it had been emphasised that the needs

of Borough residents must be given priority. Members felt that professional advice from Officers was required and an assurance was requested that money for coalfield regeneration would go to mining villages and not into a collective pot at Staffordshire County Council.

The Health and Well Being Strategy remained with the Health Scrutiny Committee. There was a small working group at Staffordshire County Council that the Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee had attended, and the issue would be received at a special meeting of Cabinet. There was a request that the Committee be kept informed of developments.

Officers were investigating a number of models for leisure trust options. Members were advised that officers were investigating the feasibility of a Community Interest Company (C.I.C.) on the basis that it was thought that this would not only provide an appropriate governance structure but also could reduce business rate obligations.

Members noted it was almost twelve months since Cabinet had resolved that a review of the allotments service should be conducted, and requested a progress report. This would be distributed to Members before the next meeting, and the review would be considered at the December meeting.

The Committee received an update regarding Kidsgrove Sports Centre. The building was expected to be handed back from Staffordshire County Council imminently and was expected to be open to the public towards the end of September or early October. The majority of works were complete, but other problems had been found, and it was estimated that approximately £250,000 had been spent compared to the £100,000 that had been envisaged. The pumps and filters for the swimming pool would need to be serviced as they had not been used for twelve months. Due to the condition of the building, more unexpected closures in the future could not be ruled out. A comprehensive refurbishment would cost around £3-3.5 million, for which there was no funding available. Instead, the refurbishment could be broken down into component parts and funding sought for each part. For example, the windows in the pool hall could be replaced or the changing rooms could be refurbished. Securing funding for refurbishment would be the responsibility of all three parties associated with the sports centre: Clough Hall School, Staffordshire County Council and the Borough Council. The school and the County Council were responsible for maintenance and the Borough Council was responsible for the operation of the centre.

Members were concerned that fixing problems such as windows could be a sticking plaster for structural problems. The building opened in the early 1970s and Officers were not aware of any structural concerns. Members were of the opinion that the Borough Council and the school fell down by not pushing the County Council enough to get the works done and that a structure was required to get any future problems dealt with. Officers advised that the school made a conscious decision to withdraw from the County Councils maintenance service and go it alone some years ago. Members noted an entry on the work plan that a guarantee be sought from the County Council to conduct regular maintenance checks in the future, and stressed that the County Council must be asked to conduct a very thorough inspection.

Members noted that Clough Hall School had made it through the first round of applications for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding and questioned whether a swimming pool would be incorporated into the design if the school was rebuilt. It would be unlikely for there to be a new school development for at least eight years, should the school make it through the other stages, and it would be unlikely that a

sports centre would be a part of a PFI. Members felt that this should be kept under scrutiny as money could be spent refurbishing the sports centre, for a new centre to then be built.

The Committee considered the Chair's suggestion for a new scrutiny topic of sports development within the Borough. The Olympics had ignited an interest in sport and there were a lot of talented sports people within the Borough. Both adults and children were becoming involved in sport and it was important to get coaches involved in coaching youngsters.

Previously, there had been a School of Sports between the Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council and it was questioned whether this could be re-established. Funding would be an issue, and Members felt it would be best to begin with the idea that there was no money available. Officers advised there would be restrictions due to the limited resource available at the Council and how a School of Sports would be funded required careful thought. Members considered the main cost would be funding coaches, but that the Committee members would have contacts with local clubs that could be utilised. Sports venues within the Borough could be contacted to see if they would be interested in becoming involved and it was considered that minority sport organisations may be more inclined to fund and support sporting initiatives. Members considered that multi-use grounds should also be explored as they would be of low or perhaps even zero cost. Members also considered that the focus should not solely be on talented children, as some winning British athletes at the Olympics had taken up their sports as adults. The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure considered it an excellent idea, although it would be a lot of work.

Members raised 'Tennis for Free' which provided funding for court repairs and coaching. Officers concurred that this was a good organisation and they would push them again as they had received a mixed response previously. Officers highlighted that it was free to play tennis on a lot of Borough courts. Members questioned where Newcastle Athletic Club and Newcastle Swimming Club obtained their funding and it was understood to be from subscriptions. Both clubs did well and the amateur swimming at Jubilee 2 was worthy of note.

The Committee agreed that a scrutiny brief would be developed for the next meeting which would include how sports development could proceed, who the Committee would like to get involved and to set the parameters of what the Committee would like to achieve. Members considered that sports development should be Staffordshire based rather than Newcastle based. The members of the Committee would speak to their local sporting clubs.

RESOLVED: (a) That an assurance be obtained that money for coalfield regeneration would remain for mining villages.

(b) That a progress report be provided for the Allotments Review and that the Allotments Review be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

(c) That Staffordshire County Council be asked to conduct a thorough inspection of Kidsgrove Sports Centre.

(d) That a scrutiny brief for sports development be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

6. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business considered.

COUNCILLOR GEORGE CAIRNS
Chair