

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 30 October 2024 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Carr, D.	Lang, J.
Castle, G.	Mather, M.
Dale, A.	Morphet, N.
Gallacher, B.	Reid, J.

OTHER COUNCILLORS

J. Watson	Promoting Healthy Lives
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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

H. Bowers	Democratic Services Officer
K. Lounton	Head of Community Services
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
G.O' Neill	Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities & Stronger Communities

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

P Metcalfe	Contract Manager, Places People for Leisure
S Warriner	Area Manager, Places for People Leisure

1 member of the press.

18. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cartie and N Walsh.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 25 September 2024 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

20. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting with the latest Forward Plan of key items (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

A report on improving the condition of roads from Highways would be presented to the Committee on 27 November 2024.

A link would be shared with members on the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Plan 2024/25, considered by Cabinet on 17 September 2024.

RESOLVED that the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet and the Forward Plan of key items be noted.

21. OVERVIEW

21.1 Places for People Leisure Introduction

Councillor Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives was delighted to introduce the first report of the new leisure providers – Places for People Leisure. He stated that since the new providers had taken over there had been some negative comments regarding the consultation and redundancies. Councillor Watson reported that the consultation had created new opportunities. There had been 11 redundancies, of which only 1 was compulsory. The report showed an increase of usage in the centres in the first 6 months.

Steve Warriner, Area Manager and Paul Metcalfe, Contract Manager were in attendance.

A presentation was shared which explained what the organisation was committed to:

- Places Leisure was a social enterprise offering health and wellbeing facilities across the UK.
- Founded in 1991 operating under a not-for-profit organisation and any profit was reinvested.
- Working with 36 local authority partners, and managing just over 103 leisure facilities.
- The turnover for 2022/23 had been £849.6m which generated a total social value of £272m.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Communities and Place OSC, 30 October 2024

- Operating an Active Communities Outreach Programme with the objective of tackling inequality with a mission to create thriving communities in and outside of leisure centres. Community based activities within care homes.
- The six-month overview showed a phenomenal achievement over the first 6 months. With Places paying a Real Living Wage, all staff received between 5% and 7% pay increase on transfer. Staff benefits also included free family membership to facilities, a health cashback plan and discount voucher scheme. Staff recognition schemes included Manager Awards, Long Service Awards and Star Awards. Staff development opportunities included a free LinkedIn learning licence and Career Compass, which allowed staff to map out their aspirational career. Staff were able to communicate with senior managers through Colleague Voice representatives or a dedicated social media channel, Viva Engage.
- More people were employed across the country as an outcome of the contract.
- New roles had been made available across the county, due to the nature of the contract.
- The capital spend for Year 1 was £4,955.685 which included IT, energy reduction, marketing, Lynxight which used AI to send alerts to prevent water distress incidents. Soft play and clip and climb.
- The energy reduction investment included installation of LED lights and solar panels for Blyth, Ashington, Willowburn and replacement solar panels for Concordia.
- The invest to improve schemes covered gym refurbishments at Willowburn, Ashington, Prudhoe and Concordia, soft play/clip and climb at Ponteland and Concordia squash courts.
- The healthy communities programme had moved away from the traditional leisure contract to deliver exercise to the hard of reach communities to reduce health inequalities across the county. This included exercise referral which had added swimming and all group exercises. 500 people were actively participating in the programme as new members since using the ReferAll system and 56 had completed the programme.
- The GoodBoost programme for MSK issues had been implemented in Blyth and Wentworth with 37 active users.
- An NHS funded space for Cancer Rehab had been secured in partnership with the Cancer Prehab Service and See Sport Differently training in collaboration with British Blind Sport delivered across the county.
- All sites had the Big Sister Project running with weekly sessions, working on girls' confidence and activity.
- The NHS MSK team were delivering within centres utilising spaces and creating a natural referral pathway. Free family swims had been issued with 5 day passes to Concordia Leisure Centre for colleagues in Homes Plus to share with residents whilst their homes were being upgraded.
- Additional session of Mams on the Move.
- What's next, imminently:

- Staffing structure – a team was in place for November to expand services outside of centres.
- GoodBoost – expanding to Berwick and Concordia in November.
- Cardiac Rehab – sessions being added to Ponteland where there was currently no provision.
- Expanding wellbeing walks – current walks mapped to identify where expansion could be targeted to ensure wider cover.
- Developing Mams on the Move – creating more opportunities for mams to be active outside.
- Family Hubs – working with family hubs to understand barriers to activity.
- What's next, 2025:
 - GoodBoost to all wet centres
 - Escape Pain in collaboration with NHS MSK.
 - Move through Menopause Courses to be delivered across the county.
 - Cardiac Rehab.
- Membership information – membership had increased at end of September to 32,246. The numbers had increased since April by 3.87%.
- Usage - Morpeth Leisure Centre had the highest usage followed by Concordia and Ashington.
- Growth – Q1 to Q2. Q2 usage was lower but this was during the summer holidays. It was hoped to report a comparative figure this time next year.
- Workforce management – the previous operator was a stand-alone trust and had roles that were duplicated within the Places Leisure structure. The contract required the addition of roles to meet contractual obligations especially within communities and undertaking maintenance on buildings.
- Investment in the Proud to Serve Costa Model that would provide full allergen control and consistent product offer.
- Consultation with colleagues to align to Places Leisure model was complete and new roles had been created.
- £25m of Social Value per year and 56% delivered within the first 6 months. A national formula could be shared to show how this was created.
- The Social Value Dashboard displayed the Social Value KPIs based on total social value generated; total number of Social Value participants; Social Value per person and Social Value per site.
- Service Planning:
 - Currently working with NCC colleagues to agree dashboard of KPIs
 - KPIs provide intelligence and insights into Year 1 Operation for baseline information.
 - Intelligence would also drive capital expenditure from Year 2 and beyond.
 - Draft Service Plan to OSC for review and comment.

Members were informed that the new contract had given the opportunity was to take a deep dive and in turn shape the contract to meet the needs of residents and staff and promote the corporate agenda for NCC in tackling inequalities.

NCC had tackling inequalities at is core and was innovative moving away from a traditional centre. Six tenders had been received as the market had been competitive because of wider social opportunities.

As the specification of the contract was different from traditional leisure specification this had attracted interest from other local authorities across the country about the Northumberland way of doing things. This was a public document and could be shared with members.

The following information was provided in response to questions and comments from Members:

- Any queries or complaints should be forwarded to Councillor Jeff Watson in the first instance.
- Activities and sessions were run so they could complement each other. Hexham used the pool for lane swimming and the swimming club, and Prudhoe was used for fun activities. Ponteland's facilities contained a splash pad and activities and traditional pool.
- It had been agreed that a report would be considered by the committee after the first 6 months of operation.
- Apprenticeships were approximately the same as before the Places contract.
- Newbiggin had received a significant amount of refurbishment, with the Community Hub opening last year.
- Most of the Health Community Teams had been appointed. Four co-ordinators were working on an action plan.
- Investment had taken place in new facilities in terms of securing members. A lot of work had been carried out around membership, retention and acquisition and membership numbers were reviewed daily.
- Recruitment was being carried out for Contract Health Community and Social Prescribing roles to bridge the gap between GPs. Once all the teams were in place, further information would be shared at a future meeting.
- The Active Communities Programme was a way of reaching out to those in hard to reach communities and targeted those who were inactive to become active.
- In some instances, hours had been reduced, particularly around catering. Where hours had been reduced, other ways had been introduced where hours employees could make up their hours, eg PT.
- Ashington usage had dropped because of some components of the spas not working and breaking down, but this had been across the county and usage was on the increase again.
- Lynxight was relatively new and provided additional detection which tracked swimming behaviours which would alert a lifeguard.

- There were no plans to introduce any more clip and climb facilities as they were not installed within 25 miles of each other as it created more competition between leisure sites.
- The Authority was satisfied with the restructure, transparency and openness of the consultation, which was a business operating model, moved to a more appropriate contract.
- A healthy food offer had been specified and the committee could consider the on-going Costa business model.
- There had been increased roles in front facing staff and job titles had been aligned to roles which would enhance the customer experience.
- There were ways which local leisure businesses could be supported to allow them to deliver their services
- KPIs were discussed at meetings, which were shaped throughout the year, eg tackling inequalities and outcomes. More people were employed across the country as an outcome of the contract. A more thorough deep dive could be brought to a future scrutiny meeting.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted and note the presentation and its review to be included in the work programme for future meetings.

(Councillors Castle and Watson left the meeting at 3.33 pm).

22. Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2023/24 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes). The following issues were raised:

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that:

The Social Housing report which was due to be considered by the OSC in November would be included in a Housing Policy document which would now be presented to the Committee next year. The Chair requested that a report on Housing Allocation be requested for presentation to the January 2025 meeting.

The outcomes of the BEST Review of Regulation and Enforcement would be provided to the meeting on 29 January 2025

With regard to the Highways Maintenance Action Plan which would be considered by the OSC on 27 November 2024, the Vice-Chair sought assurance that it would include a response to overhanging trees and shrubs that were identified as a danger to road users during the OSC's earlier review. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed that he had raised this with officers and was advised that it would be included in the Trees and Woodland Strategy report but agreed to contact them again to ensure that the issue would be covered in the November presentation.

Members referred to an email they had received from Councillor Flux (Chair of the Scrutiny Chairs' Group) reflecting on how scrutiny was working since the 'refresh' conducted in partnership with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2022. Whilst they agreed that the move away from the mandatory pre-scrutiny of Cabinet reports had allowed the Committee space to set its own priorities through the work programme, members noted that in exceptional circumstances reports could be pre-scrutinised although the preference would be to be involved much earlier in the process of policy development so that they could influence issues at the drafting stages.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the work programme be noted and suggested changes be actioned by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, and
- (b) the comments regarding the scrutiny arrangements be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____