

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 16th October, 2013.

Present: Cllr Eileen Johnson(Vice Chairman), Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Ray McCall, Cllr Andrew Sherris

Officers: Gemma Borsberry(CESC), Judith Trainer, Sarah Whaley(LD)

Also in attendance: Cllr Derrick Brown, Steve Rose(Catalyst Stockton), Ian Bartlett, Janine Brown, Emma Gordon(Stockton & District Advice & Information Service)

Apologies: Cllr Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Mick Womphrey

ALC 33/13 Committee Briefing

Members prepared their approach to the meeting.

ALC 34/13 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

ALC 35/13 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

ALC 36/13 Minutes for Signature

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting which was held on the 24th July 2013 for signature.

AGREED that the minutes be signed.

ALC 37/13 Draft minutes from the meeting which was held on the 18th September 2013.

Consideration was given to the minutes from the meeting which was held on the 18th September 2013 for approval.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

ALC 38/13 Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty

Members received evidence from Stockton & District Advice & Information Service(SDAIS) and Catalyst Stockton in relation to the Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty.

Representatives from SDAIS presented the Committee with a brief outline of the services they offered to residents of Stockton and in particular in relation to the review of child poverty. The main issues discussed were as follows:

- The SDAIS was Stockton's Citizens Advice Bureau(CAB), which was a member of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. The General

Manager of the SDAIS informed members that being part of the national association enabled individual CAB services the ability to tackle common problems with an amplified voice, such as tackling Pay Day loan issues.

- SDAIS service areas were grouped into 3, which consisted of:
- Welfare Advice Services
- Social Policy Evidence and Action
- Social Policy Research and Evidence

- Members were informed that many people faced interrelated issues and when attending the SDAIS for help may arrive with a specific area of need to overcome without realising the knock on effect it could have in other areas. For example a redundancy may lead to debt problems which could in turn lead to housing issues. The SDAIS would highlight other areas with clients and then refer individuals to all necessary services for help and guidance. The majority of this could be done within SDAIS due to the wide range of social welfare areas SDAIS was qualified to advise on.

- The Committee heard that social policy research helped identify where specific services were required in particular areas. The SDAIS would then target those services that were required to help in order to sort problems out at the root cause to minimise repeat clients.

- Officers touched on the importance of partnership working and in particular that SDAIS had a good working relationship with Stockton Borough Council. An example of this was explained where surgeries had been set up by SDAIS in Children's Centres within the borough in order to offer help and advice to those families who needed it. Members were also informed that SDAIS were the lead agency in the Stockton Welfare and Advice Network(SWAN). The long term objective of SWAN was to improve services by improving data collection, data sharing, improved client access and referrals, through one set of combined data.

- During 2012 - 2013 SDAIS had seen 9809 clients and had dealt with 39350 new enquiries. The biggest areas where clients needed help was debt and welfare benefit advice. Members asked if information could be provided indicating how these problems were impacting on children. Officers explained that due to the quantity and pressure of cases it was currently facing, it would be difficult to drill down to that level of data, some case examples however could be provided anonymously. The Committee asked how successful the service were in reaching hard to reach groups. Representatives of SDAIS explained that annual reviews were undertaken on the types of clients accessing the service. Pro-active work could be undertaken however this put extra pressure on SDAIS resources in particular where home visits were required. SDAIS also had a comprehensive data collection system that could record and analyse advice needs and client profile (eg enquiry areas/numbers by ward, age, ethnicity, household type etc). This could also track changes in advice needs over time and show areas of increasing need.

- Representatives of SDAIS explained that a crisis management service was also in operation as an initial response to families who needed immediate or short term help. The Committee asked how clients were prioritised when in crisis. It was explained that appointment and drop in systems were in operation,

however, if it was determined that a family or individual was in crisis, their needs would be dealt with straight away. If it was agreed that it was not a crisis situation then an appointment would be made. Clients could also be signposted to other agencies for the appropriate help. Once the crisis element had been dealt with, the longer term needs of the family would be tackled. The General Manager of SDAIS explained to members that by working closely with other organisations and local authority departments such as Housing Options etc. and sharing client data, clients could be helped more effectively.

- SDAIS then went on to highlight that following the end of legal aid, the service had been forced to lose 4 debt case workers. There was currently a 2 week wait to see a debt case worker however urgent cases were seen as an emergency.

- The Committee asked the representatives of SDAIS what impact Payday Loans had had on the service. Members learned that 3 case studies had been forwarded to the MP for Stockton North demonstrating the negative impact of this type of credit. Officers highlighted that alternative credit sources needed to be investigated but highlighted with the right benefit and money management advice some families may not need to take out credit. Many families were not aware of the criteria required to claim or what benefits were available highlighting a huge amount of under claiming. Of the clients that had reported back, SDAIS had succeeded in assisting clients in securing £1.1 million worth of benefits.

- Members also received further information from officers detailing the following:

- SDAIS attended court with clients where necessary, when facing the prospect of homes being repossessed

- Employment advice was given to clients geared towards getting people back into work or possibly resolving employment issues for employees and employers.

- Practical help in terms of helping clients to obtain the correct identification to enable them to open bank accounts.

- SDAIS provided advice and training to help people manage their money better, including advice on budgeting, fuel switching and saving.

- SDAIS did social policy work at local and national level; examples of national social policy work included evidence on Pay Day Loans; local social policy work included evidence on Local Social Fund arrangements.

A representative of Catalyst proceeded to deliver a presentation to members highlighting the Voluntary and Community Sector(VCS) interventions in Stockton in relation to the Scrutiny Committee Review of Child Poverty. The main issues were discussed as follows:

- The determinants of Child Poverty as identified by the Government.

- VCS Approach, starting with the child and assembling the required services around them.

- A brief overview of other VCS organisations in Stockton able to provide help and advice.

- Stockton had bid for BIG Lottery funding to implement 'A Fairer Start' project which targeted 0-3 yrs using the Wave Trust report. Members heard that

although the bid had failed there would still be a pilot in Stockton Town's Centre based on the report. The representative from Catalyst informed the Committee that the Wave Trust would be coming to Stockton on the 18th December 2013. Copies of the Wave Trust report would be available for members of the Committee.

- Issues surrounding Pay Day loans mirrored that of SDAIS and members heard that a letter had been sent to the credit union from the MP for Stockton North highlighting the extent of the problems these loans were causing. It was discussed that Tees Credit Union and Five Lamps were working towards offering alternative credit to Pay Day loans.

- Members discussed the number of organisations offering help and advice and expressed concern that people in need would not necessarily know which VCS organisations were available and which suited them best. It was suggested that to make people aware of all VCS services within the borough information should be made available in one place. Officers explained that SWAN may be able to provide such information however this would only suit those members of the public who had access to the internet.

AGREED that:

- 1) the information be noted
- 2) SDAIS and Catalyst provide members with anonymous case studies.
- 3) the Scrutiny Team Leader provide Members with a copy of the Wave Trust report.

**ALC
39/13**

Work Programme

The Committee discussed the Work Programme and it was suggested that if any members had any further comments or suggestions for evidence to be considered as part of the review that they contact the Scrutiny Team Leader prior to the next meeting which was scheduled for the 27th November 2013.