

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 6 November 2023.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Michelle Bendelow, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Hugo Stratton and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

Officers: Haleem Ghafoor (AH&W), Rebecca Saunders-Thompson (CS), Vanessa Housley (ChS), Michelle Connolly (FT&P), Fallon Dunleavy, Julie Marsden and Craig Taylor (R&IG).

Also in attendance: Clare Branson and Jon Carling (Catalyst)

Apologies: None.

PEO/16/23 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/17/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/18/23 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/19/23 Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Council's Service Lead for Education and Wellbeing, which included:

- School Uniform: Scrutiny Recommendations
- School Uniform Statutory Guidance (Department for Education)
- Best Practices and Resources
- Child Poverty Action Group's School Uniforms Guide Content and Considerations
- Questions for Governors and Trustees
- Poverty Proofing the School Day
- Dissemination – School Forums, Wider Forums

The main issues highlighted from the presentation and discussed were as follows:

- Members raised concerns about a perceived general lack of support from school governors to make school uniforms more affordable.
- It was acknowledged that the Council was restricted in its influence on academies and free schools.

- For maintained schools, an annual check of school websites was undertaken by council officers to ensure that schools were compliant with current legislation and school uniform policy was included in this check.
- Officers explained that the crucial role of school governors was to challenge and support school policies. Officers agreed that this was a continual process and regularly updated governors on school uniform and the promotion of 'pre-loved' uniforms. The Council also continued to run its termly 'Closing the Gap' sessions to ensure governors remained well informed.
- Catalyst had carried out an online mapping exercise to catalogue the different services available to recycle uniform and purchase/obtain pre-loved uniforms. The possibility of opening a pre-loved uniform shop in Stockton Town Centre had also been discussed.

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Chief Executive of Catalyst Stockton and the Project Coordinator for the Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network, Catalyst Stockton, which included:

- An information leaflet on Foodbanks and other food resources in Stockton-on-Tees
- Background information on Catalyst as the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) infrastructure organisation for Stockton-on-Tees
- Catalyst Partnerships
- What is the Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network?
- Community pantries in Stockton Borough- usage statistics
- Foodbanks in Stockton Borough - usage statistics
- Providing additional support for food support services
- Food support services & the Cost of Living
- Support to the VCSE Sector
- Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Coordinator –Tackling inequalities
- Holiday Activities and Food Programme/ Holiday Enrichment Programme
- Roseworth Big Local
- Charitable funding sources in 2022-23
- Conclusions
- What can the Council learn from the VCSE sector?

The main issues highlighted from the presentation and discussed were as follows:

- According to the Trussell Trust, in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees, there had been a 30% increase in visits to foodbanks and a 50% decrease in donations over the last year.
- In Stockton, in September 2023, 470 children had received food parcels.
- The number of people receiving help from foodbanks and pantries that were also in employment was increasing.
- A discussion was held on reports of the increasing financial burden on parents and grandparents to support young people/adults struggling with the cost of living. Catalyst representatives were unable to provide data on this but were aware of cases.
- Members thanked those who worked and volunteered in foodbanks and pantries.
- Members questioned if Catalyst's 'Grantfinder' could be promoted as part of this review. Catalyst representatives expressed that demand for Grantfinder had increased each year and the promotion of Grantfinder and volunteering opportunities would be appreciated.
- A discussion on support and donations received from supermarkets was held. Catalyst representatives commented that they had a good relationship with

supermarkets, and had received generous donations from supermarkets, however, the amount of donations from supermarkets had decreased in general.

- It was explained that it was a requirement of 'The Bread and Butter Thing' to have access to a mobile phone to receive a text message for the service. However, if a service user did not possess a mobile phone, they could provide a friend or family member's phone number, with their permission.

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Council's Head of Revenue, Benefits and Welfare, which included:

- The Impact of the Cost of Living
- Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Service: Our Welfare Support Approach
- Financial Support: Funding Streams
- 2022 Financial Support at a Glance
- Income Maximisation: Range of Support
- 2022 Income Maximisation at a Glance
- Internal and External Partners
- Engaging with Residents and Staff

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Council's Economic Development Manager and Employment and Training Hub Manager, which included:

- Skills and Employment: Employment and Training Hub
- Hub on Tour Pilot: Reaching residents across the Borough
- New Portal: Residents can access support 24/7
- Working with Businesses: Our Offer
- What's Next?
- Further information

The main issues highlighted from the presentation and discussed were as follows:

- Members thanked the Employment and Training Hub staff for assisting the public with CVs, training, and completing employment and apprenticeships applications. It was noted that the Hub also provided assistance to those who wanted a career change.
- Members congratulated the Hub staff for their recent achievement of assisting 500 people into jobs since the Hub's launch.
- Members questioned if the Hub charged for its services. Officers responded that the Hub did not charge for any of its services.
- Members were informed that an upcoming recruitment campaign for a well-known high street business was to be held in the Hub over a three-week period and this would bring money into the local economy.
- Members were also informed of an upcoming 'Green Jobs' employment week. Previous events provided networking opportunities for businesses as well as providing the public with options to meet prospective employers.

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Council's Adult Learning and Skills Manager, which included:

- Service Overview
- Learning for Inclusion
- Cost of Living Responsive Courses
- Wider Examples of Inclusive Courses
- Wider Examples of Skills Courses

- Cost of Living Future Plans

AGREED that the information be noted.

PEO/20/23 Chair's Update and Work Programme 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

An additional evidence session would be held, via Teams, on Tuesday 21 November 2023, 12pm-2pm.

The next Committee meeting would be held on Monday 4 December 2023.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.