

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 24th January, 2018

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor O'Donnell (Chairperson);
Aldermen Kingston and L. Patterson;
Councillors Beattie, Dudgeon, Graham, Hargey,
Kyle, Magee, Mullan, O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. D. Durkan, Director of Development;
Ms. L. Toland, Economic Development Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Aldermen Haire and McGimpsey and Councillors Boyle, Dorrian, Johnston and McAteer.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentations

The Economic Development Manager outlined to the Committee that Employability and Skills was a priority within the Belfast Agenda and was a commitment in line with the Employability and Skills Framework.

She highlighted to the Members that the Council had made a commitment to Inclusive Growth and that there was a need to establish a 'pathway' to ensure that individuals could progress and avail of the support which they needed.

The Committee was advised that youth outreach and engagement was crucial, and that while securing a job was not the reason for their participation in outreach activities, the programmes were used as a way of encouraging disenfranchised young people to think positively about their future.

She outlined to the Committee that, as a result, the Active Communities Network (ACN) and Sport Changes Life (SCL) had been established as pilot activities, each having received £100,000 from the Council to deliver such programmes. She advised the Members that, as the first year was coming to its conclusion, there was a need to review the impact and the lessons which had been learned from each programme in order that the Council could consider how value was added to a wider collaborative approach.

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Active Communities Network

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Mr. J. Donnelly and Mr. M. Copeland, Active Communities Network (ACN), were in attendance and they were welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. Donnelly provided the Committee with an overview of their work and described how the Network worked across the City, specifically within disadvantaged communities.

Mr. Copeland advised the Members that the Network's focus was to engage young people at risk and provide tailored support around their needs using their delivery methodology. He outlined that it worked with a broad range of community and youth delivery partners within local communities across Belfast, such as Hammer in the Shankill area, Alternatives in the Woodvale area, Charter NI in the inner east and the Ormeau Boxing Club in the inner south of the City.

In response to a Member's question regarding east Belfast, he advised the Committee that they worked in Tullycarnet and Dundonald, as well as the Newtownards Road and the Short Strand. He advised that he would provide information on any work which had taken place in the Cregagh area.

He also advised the Members that ACN had built up strategic relationships with companies such as British Telecom (BT) and Asda, where they worked in partnership to provide high quality placement and employment opportunities for local young people.

Mr. Donnelly provided the Committee with an overview of the Council-funded Employability and Skills project, which was targeted at enhancing the employability of young people, aged 16-21, who were not in Education, Employment or training (NEET). He advised the Members that they had supported 112 young people to deliver 6 Social Action projects within their communities, including volunteering and supporting charities, and that 56 young people had achieved 75 accredited qualifications linked to their preferred progression route.

He outlined that 32 young people had been supported into employment and an additional 11 young people had been supported into further education as a result of the project and he highlighted that capacity building for those young people was crucial.

The Committee was advised that ACN had secured £100,000 sponsorship from Lucozade which would enable them to continue their work, and that they had also recently been advised that their application for funding through the European Social Fund had been successful. He advised the Committee that he hoped to secure the necessary match funding in the near future to deliver the project across Belfast.

The Director of Development advised the Members that, as part of its Workshop on 21st February, the Committee would consider the outcomes from the pilot projects to determine the Council's youth employability and skills pathway.

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Mr. Donnelly advised the Members of the Committee that they were invited to attend the Network's Employability Celebration Evening on 20th February, at 6 p.m. in the City Hall, where they could hear more about the success stories from the young participants themselves.

In relation to the evaluation of the pilot project, Mr Donnelly advised that the University of Liverpool and Ulster University had been commissioned to analyse the outcomes and that early indications from the Ulster University had shown that they agreed with ACN's approach.

A Member congratulated the representatives from ACN on having secured private sector funding and requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting to provide the Committee with information on the wider, holistic support which ACN had provided through its pilot programme, in terms of providing support from the initial contact with a young person, through to attaining qualifications or employment, re-entering education or progressing within an organisation, particularly in the context of the City Deal.

The Committee agreed to this course of action.

The Committee thanked the representatives for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Sport Changes Life

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Mr. G. Maguire, Sport Changes Life, was in attendance and he was welcomed to the meeting.

He provided the Committee with an outline of how Sport Changes Life (SCL) had been established. He explained to the Members that he was a former teacher and that he wanted to improve the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds through sport. He described how he had incorporated his many contacts in the U.S.A who were involved in basketball and created the EHOOPS and Victory Scholar programmes.

He advised the Members that, while not all young people were interested in basketball or any sport, it was merely used as a hook to encourage young people to engage with the programme.

He outlined that SCL aimed to raise the aspirations of young people through sporting excellence, vocational and academic achievement and personal development. He explained that there was a 76% reduction in hate crime over the first three months of the EHOOPS programme, a 29% reduction in anti-social behaviour and 80% attendance at the EHOOPS programme.

In response to a Member's question about those young people who were not interested in sport, he explained that sport was only a small part of the programme and that it was also about encouraging the young people to have conversations about their future and ensuring that they had good mental health.

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In response to a Member's question regarding engaging young people in non-school settings, such as through youth groups and community work, he described how it was very difficult to connect with young people and build their trust and simultaneously push them into training or employment against their will.

He commended the Council on its Employability Academies.

In relation to a Member's question regarding how the pilot project would be evaluated, Mr. Maguire advised the Committee that the numbers would be appraised and that the Ulster University had created a pathfinder programme. He added that SCL only operated in areas where it would make a difference and that it had previously commenced a project in an area which, after a short while, it had become apparent that did not require assistance and that it moved on to another area instead.

After discussion, Mr. Maguire outlined the details of the successful Basketball Hall of Fame Belfast Basketball Classic and explained that eight teams from the U.S.A. would be attending the 2018 event.

The Committee thanked Mr. Maguire for his presentation and he retired from the meeting.

Chairperson