

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL Monday 23rd December 2019

1. DECISIONS

The following papers went to Executive on 19th November 2019:

Strategic Plan Quarter 2 – Progress Report

Revenue Budget Timetable

The following papers are due to go to Executive on 20th December 2019:

Calculation of Council Tax Base for 2020/21

Local Council Tax Support 2020/21

2. STRATEGIC

Social Care – Children’s

The South Tees Multi Agency Children’s hub are moving “front door recording” the initial contact with the service from the LCS (Liquid Logic Children’s) application to EHM (Early Help Module) on the 13th November. This aligns with the approach used by Redcar and Cleveland, this will mean that all front door contacts will be recorded in EHM. Once live, this module will allow the First Contact team to quickly identify children and families requiring support at the earliest opportunity.

Bulky Waste Collection

Following the mayors commitment to introduction a Premium Bulky Waste collection service for the public, ICT have worked closely with the Councils Contact and Environmental Service to deliver an appropriate solution. A significant waiting list has built up due to the removal of Bulky waste collection charges earlier in the year. The introduction of the Premium, chargeable option has provided a service for the collection of waste within 4-6 weeks and has proved popular with the public resulting in additional income for the Council. The collection times for the free service has also been reduced to between 11 and 15 weeks. The applications team responded to the request at short notice, prioritising work and liaising with the Contact Centre and Environmental Services to deliver an online solution to support the business.

Digital City Initiative

Support of the Councils vision to attract further Digital Business investment to Middlesbrough, ICT Services are working closely with Environment on the expansion of the current Boho site with Boho 8, an expansion to the existing Boho 1 building utilising innovative building techniques. ICT are working closely with and have begun discussions with the consultants designing Boho 8 in order to define networking requirements for the building design to allow connectivity and management from Boho One. Boho 8 is likely to be opened in summer 2020.

Financial Inclusion Group

This report is to update the Local Authority on the impact that the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign and Hub Advice Service programme has had across Middlesbrough since its inception in 2013.

Background

The Financial Inclusion Group (FIG) was established in 2012. The FIG is a partnership made up of different organisations from the public and voluntary sectors in Middlesbrough.

The vision of FIG is that all communities in Middlesbrough will have access to appropriate financial services, advice and information that enables them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, plan for the future and deal effectively with financial hardship. In order to achieve this FIG partners, work together to focus on ensuring that:

- People have access to readily available and free money / debt advice;
- Work is carried out to tackle fuel poverty;
- People's knowledge and understanding of the different financial products and their merits is improved;
- People have access to bank accounts and use such accounts to best effect;
- People have access to sources of affordable credit; and,
- People understand the value of saving and are helped to develop saving habits.

The FIG Group has developed and coordinated various initiatives to promote financial inclusion and to help mitigate the impact of the Welfare Reforms including:

- The Unclaimed Benefit Campaign and Hub Advice Service
- Partnership Forum – "Welfare Reforms the Story So Far"
- Pay Day Mayday Campaign – focusing on high interest pay day loan companies
- Banning of Pay Day Loan websites on Council computer equipment
- Illegal Money Lending – Weeks of Action
- Supporting and Promotion of the Community Bank

It was reported that **£10bn** of benefit entitlement went unclaimed in the UK for **2017/18** with housing benefits and pension credit being two keys areas not claimed.

In an attempt to help address the problem of unclaimed benefits and changes to welfare benefits system, Middlesbrough Council has financially supported the Unclaimed Benefit

Campaign and Hub Advice Service programme, reaching across the town and helping those who need it the most.

Unclaimed Benefit Campaign and Hub Service Programme

The Hub Advice Service pilot started in 2013 (which was funded through The Big Lottery programme) and due to a growing demand for advice and support (in particular due to welfare reforms), this was complemented by the development of the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign which started in 2015 initially funded through the Public Health budget.

Middlesbrough Council has provided funding and support to bring together the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign (UBC) and HUB Advice Services under one project.

UBC and Hub Advice Service is a collaborative initiative developed by the Financial Inclusion Group (FIG). The delivery partner organisations are (CAB) Citizens Advice Bureau, lead partner, Middlesbrough Council/Welfare Rights Unit, Age UK, CHAC (Cleveland Housing and Advice Centre) and Actes (Achieving Change Through Enterprising Solutions). The programme offers one-to-one advice sessions with the aims of:

- Providing advice regarding benefit entitlement and improve up take
- Engage with a range of other support services and advice available

The Hub Advice Service provides access to advice based in various locations the town and sessions run weekly. The current Hub Advice service operates from 5 Community Hubs.

Following the initial success of the Hub Advice service in 2013 it presented another problem in trying to reach to a wider audience and address the growing demand for support. Partners from the FIG group came together and developed the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign. Its approach is to take advice and support out to the communities across Middlesbrough and reach more people.

In 2015 the FIG was awarded the Middlesbrough Council Partnership Award for the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign in recognition of the excellent partnership work that is undertaken to deliver the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign and Hub Advice Service.

What has the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign and Hub Advice Service programme achieved since 2013 & 2015?

We report on a monthly basis to the project steering group on how the programme is doing and recently developed a monthly update that is circulated to all ward councillors.

Since 2013 the Hub Service has:

Supported and advised **4462** people accessing the service

The estimated amount of benefits that the hubs have supported people to claim since 2013 is **£10,302,101.15**

Since 2015 the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign has:

Supported and advised **4462** people accessing the service

The estimated amount of benefits that the hubs have supported people to claim since 2015 is **£13,634,527.07**

Local Economic Development

The potential wider impact/contribution that the Unclaimed Benefit Campaign and Hub Service programme has made to the wider economy of Middlesbrough is estimated by applying a multiplier developed by the New Economics Foundation, Ambrose and Stone – they conclude financial gains through advice and support should have a multiplier effect of 1.7 (viewed as a conservative estimate) applied, therefore the value to the local economy of Middlesbrough is estimated to be: **£40,692,267.97**.

Stanhope

At the Extraordinary Council meeting on 6 August 2019 it was agreed:

1. That the Council resolves to seek to discuss the current situation with the Councils that were involved that formed Cleveland County Council; and
2. That an update be brought to full Council, following the publication of the interim findings.

The Strategic Director of Finance, Governance and Support has briefed the relevant Directors of Resources and Chief Executives and asked that they discuss it with their Members as appropriate.

The Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Abuse published its report on the Accountability and Reparations section of the Inquiry, in which Stanhope Castle was one of the case studies, on 19 September. That report made a number of statements about Middlesbrough Council and how it had administered the civil claims which had come forward from victim/survivors of Stanhope Castle. A Members' briefing was held to brief all members on the outcome of the report and there was some media coverage at the time.

A new phase of the Inquiry including new live evidence sessions has been announced for 26-28 November. The Council has continued to be a core participant in the Inquiry and has submitted further written evidence in connection with the themes being tackled by the Inquiry. However the focus of the Inquiry in this phase is on technical legal issues about redress schemes and the statute of limitation and the Council, like other local authorities, has not been called to give live evidence.

We continue to manage the civil claims of victim/survivors who come forward seeking compensation in a prompt and sensitive way.

Councillor Chris Hobson
Executive Member for Finance and Governance