
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 13 October 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair); Councillors Booth, Cole, Ferrier, Mawston, Robson, Rogers and T Ward.

OFFICIALS: B Baldam, J Bennington, K Brooks, C Burnham, P Clark, J Ord, J Polson, S Postlethwaite, K E Robinson, H White and E Williamson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dryden, Rooney and Wilson.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 21 September 2004 were submitted and approved.

MATTERS ARISING - REPORT ON INCLUSION OF NON EXECUTIVE MEMBERS - GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION PROSTITUTION

The Chair referred to a recent meeting and future discussions to be held with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive (Performance and Policy) regarding the way forward on the suggestions outlined within the report on the inclusion on Non-Executive Members. Such issues included the format of Council meetings, which would necessitate a revision of the Council's Constitution.

Further to the meeting of the Board held on 21 September the Chair confirmed that the report in relation to the response to the recent Home Office Consultation paper on prostitution was to be referred to the Prostitution Task Group. It was acknowledged that the work undertaken by scrutiny in respect of prostitution would be of assistance to the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel when it undertakes its next topic of investigation relating to Drugs and Drug Treatment.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REPORT - EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK

As part of the scrutiny process the Executive Officer Manager reported that the Executive at its meeting held on 28 September 2004 had considered the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel regarding the final report on Permanently Excluded Pupils within Middlesbrough.

The Executive had considered and supported both the Service Response and the response of the Corporate Management Team and had agreed the proposed Action Plan.

The Board's attention was drawn to additional recommendations of the Executive and the action taken in respect of the following:

1. That the Mayor be supplied with the main reasons for exclusions, both permanent and fixed term, from the City Academies.
2. That a meeting be arranged between the Schools Minister, David Milliband, and the Mayor in the near future to discuss the issue further.

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3. That a meeting be arranged between the Executive Member for Early Years, the Executive Director of Education and the Mayor to discuss the issues in detail and agree a way forward.

NOTED

BUDGET PRINCIPLES

The Director of Resources presented a report, which outlined the proposed budget principles to be applied in the preparation of the 2005/2006 General Fund Revenue Budget and over the medium term (2005/06-2007/08).

In preparing the 2005/06 projected revenue budget and medium term plan, the following principles, consistent with the previous year's budget strategies and statements made by the Executive had been applied:

- a) to keep Council tax increases to reasonable levels;
- b) to maintain appropriate balances, central provisions and earmarked reserves;
- c) to make services fully accountable for their own budgets and spending and enforce a policy of no unauthorised overspending within service areas;
- d) to maintain appropriate medium term budget planning and monitoring processes, ensuring known commitments are provided for and budgets are set in real terms with the effect on service delivery clearly identified;
- e) to ringfence increases in Education FSS to Education Service budgets and to seek to maintain Education planned spending at FSS;
- f) to ensure effective budget consultation processes are followed;
- g) to ensure that the Council's financial strategy reflects the objectives of the Council;
- h) to maximise the efficient, effective and economic use of resources, in conjunction with partners where appropriate, and in accordance with local strategic plans and priorities;
- i) to maximise available resources to the environment and regeneration;
- j) no increase in Social Services expenditure other than pay awards and inflation;
- k) to ensure that the impact of legislative changes are considered as part of the budget setting process.

The Medium Term Financial Plan had been updated on the basis of the above principles, adjusted for the recent Revenue Support grant 'population case' and proposed additional investment in the Environment.

The projections had been based on information currently available and would be updated for the 2004/05 Revenue Support Grant Consultation paper, the 2004/05 2nd Quarters Budget Clinic and the Joint Performance and Budget Clinics.

Members sought clarification on a number of areas and supported the contents of the report.

NOTED

DRAFT CORPORATE CONSULTATION STRATEGY

The Partnership Manager presented a report outlining Middlesbrough Council's draft Corporate Consultation Strategy (Appendix 1) and the draft Implementation Plan (Appendix 2) which would ultimately be considered by the Executive at its meeting to be held in November 2004.

The main purpose of the strategy was to provide a toolkit for planning and evaluating consultation in the Council and to seek improvements. The two main motives for formulating such a strategy had been comments from the Audit Commission suggesting a more formalised organised structure to facilitate consultation and similar comments arising from the Corporate Performance Assessment in terms of monitoring and evaluation.

The Chair referred to the Community Engagement Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel which as part of its deliberations had considered the draft Strategy at its meeting held on 5 October and had made the following main observations: -

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- the Panel had welcomed the Strategy and recognised the importance of having a coherent and formalised structure as a guide for Members and Officers to ensure the most appropriate consultation is undertaken;
 - the Panel's overall review would embrace the extent to which the statement in the Strategy that 'Elected Members play a key role in Council's consultative processes....' reflected the current situation;
 - further information would be sought on the operation of Community Councils and Area Community Consultation Clusters;
 - scope for elected Members to access the consultation network database;
 - it was suggested that a copy of the Citizen's Panel Newsletters should be forwarded to all Members of the Council.

NOTED

CENTRAL SERVICES - INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET CLINIC

The Corporate Performance Manager submitted a report regarding the Central Services Integrated Clinic report relating to the first quarter of 2004/05.

The pilot integrated performance and budget clinics first introduced in February 2004 had been further developed to include additional issues and would be used to inform the priority setting and resource allocation processes.

NOTED

AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF ACCESS TO SERVICES

The Corporate Performance Manager submitted a report regarding the 'Access to Services' inspection report from the Audit Commission for which the Council had received its highest inspection score of 'good service' and 'promising' prospects for improvement.

Members' attention was drawn to details of the process undertaken and the specific strengths that the Inspectors had highlighted.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In a report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer details were provided of the progress achieved with the implementation of agreed Executive actions resulting from the consideration of Scrutiny reports.

Reference was made to the electronic Scrutiny Monitoring database, which had been introduced in June 2003 to enable Members to track the implementation of agreed Executive Action Plans.

In terms of the current position it was noted that the reports contained 217 recommendations of which 80 should have been implemented by September 2004 details of which were given in Appendix A of the report. Specific reference was made to the Health Scrutiny Action Plans further details of which would be submitted to the Board.

It was intended for the Board to receive update reports on a quarterly basis and a copy circulated to each Scrutiny Panel.

NOTED

ASSISTANT SCRUTINY OFFICER - KELLY BROOKS

The Chair on behalf of the Board congratulated Kelly Brooks on her recent appointment of Scrutiny Officer at Chester-le-Street District Council and wished her every success and best wishes for the future.

NOTED