

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 3 April 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors McTigue, Sanderson and T Ward.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, A Crawford, M Evershed, J Ord, N Sayer, K Stokes and E Williamson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Booth, Mawston, Robson, Rooney and Wilson.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 27 February and 6 March 2007 were submitted and approved.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – WEST MIDDLESBROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD TRUST – DIGNITY IN CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

As part of the scrutiny process and in a report of the Executive Manager it was reported that the Executive had considered the Board's comments in relation to the final reports in respect of West Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Trust and Dignity in Care for Older People.

The Executive had considered and supported both the Service and Corporate Management Team responses and had also agreed the proposed Action Plans.

NOTED

CONSOLIDATED PERFORMANCE REPORT – OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2006

In a report of the Principal Corporate Development Officer details were provided of the Council's performance, for quarter three, October to December 2006/2007 in respect of:

- a) Planned Actions given in the Strategic Plan;
- b) Performance to date against targets set for BVPIs.

In overall terms it was considered that the Council had performed well in the third quarter of 2006/07 with 87% of planned actions on target within timescale and 63% of BVPIs expected to achieve the target set.

The report outlined those Planned Actions (12%) and BVPIs (37%), which were not meeting the target and the action to be taken.

The main points arising from the subsequent deliberations were as follows: -

Planned Actions:

- a) given the impact of external factors out of the Council's control and increased partnership working a number of targets were being examined with a view to ensuring that the Council's contribution was made clear and setting a more realistic target but remaining challenging;
- b) specific reference was made to the proposals to promote greater awareness and a range of activities to be pursued in respect of target FP 15 –to increase participation levels by 20% from the baseline for Community Council/Cluster Groups;

BVPIs:

- c) Members noted the action plans in place to address the BVPIs which had been identified as not meeting the target set;
- d) the Board endorsed the monitoring arrangements in respect of the performance against the targets set for the BVPIs especially taking into account the Council's need to at least retain its 4-star CPA rating;
- e) in commenting on the results of the customer satisfaction surveys it was acknowledged that whilst information demonstrated that services were improving this had to be balanced against people's increasing expectations as reflected in the customer surveys.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND FLU PANDEMIC PLAN

The Principal Corporate Development Officer presented a report on the newly adopted corporate Business Continuity Plan and the Council's Flu Pandemic Plan.

The report outlined plans that had been developed to address the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and set out proposals to embed Business Continuity Management within Middlesbrough Council. Such plans were supported by a range of policies that had been specifically designed for use during an interruption event.

In addition to the overarching Departmental Service Plan there were service specific Continuity Plans for all services identified within the Priority Service Recovery table as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

To ensure that a culture of Business Continuity Management was successfully embedded within the Council a programme of planned actions as shown in Appendix 2 of the report submitted had been developed to promote awareness of the plan amongst staff, Members and strategic partners.

It was acknowledged that the development of the plans was an ongoing process, which together with raising awareness, testing and regularly reviewing the plans should ensure that the Council was well prepared for any event.

NOTED

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Further to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 6 March 2007 the Executive Office Manager presented a report which gave an update on the work that had been undertaken to progress the decisions of the Executive arising from the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel and also outlined a number of proposals for further work to be undertaken.

In order to address a number of issues arising from a preliminary assessment of the Community Council Cluster arrangements a review was to be undertaken which focussed on the following: -

- improving the effectiveness of the Cluster-Community Council link;
- making the bodies more reflective of the profiles of their local communities in terms of diversity/age profile;
- assessing their current role and impact and how this may be more effective;
- clarifying the link with MCN and other partners;
- the role of the ward councillor;
- assessing whether the current management arrangements of the Clusters and Community Councils could be made more effective;
- a key issue of the review was to develop Clusters that have a more strategic overview and approach to the issues involved to the neighbourhoods they covered;
- intention for Officers from regeneration and the Middlesbrough Partnership to work jointly in undertaking the review.

In terms of the support mechanisms for Councillors an audit was undertaken of the current service provision a brief overview of which was outlined in Appendix 1 of the report.

In order to ensure that Members were fully aware of the provision available it was proposed that an IT-based guide be produced outlining the nature of services provided, how they could be accessed and identifying the key contacts.

Work had also been undertaken to look at strengthening the support for and role of councillors in fulfilling their community champion role within the ward.

It was considered that the action plan (Appendix 2) of the Council's Civil Renewal Strategy could provide a framework from which the councillors community champion role could be better defined and developed.

It was proposed to compile a Members' guide to assist in raising awareness and access and provide further opportunity for greater involvement in engagement activities as presented in the Civic Renewal Strategy.

In an endeavour to promote a greater understanding of respective roles it was proposed to establish regular briefings between community workers and ward councillors to cover:

- alerting Members to issues and events – both current and anticipated;
- seeking Member guidance on dealing with local matters; and
- obtaining Member assistance in organising and preparing for events and projects.

It was intended to establish an officer working group chaired by the Community Regeneration Manager to examine potential improvements to the links between community workers and ward councillors.

Specific reference was made to a range of relevant issues in the Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'.

The Executive had not supported the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel for consideration to be given to ward-based community decision-making bodies together with 'area management committees... coterminous with the area clusters. This had been on the basis that it would be administratively costly and potentially confusing given the existing community council and cluster arrangements, whereby community councils already had budgets allocated. The Executive had taken the view that it would be more appropriate and cost effective to build on existing arrangements.

An update on the actions taken so far in respect of the service response to the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was outlined in Appendix 4 of the report.

ORDERED that the Executive be asked to consider the following recommendations in respect of the proposals and recommendations outlined in the report submitted: -

1. That the proposed Working Group referred to in relation to the development of the Community Council cluster arrangements include both Executive and Non Executive Members which should ensure representation of a range of views within the Council.
2. That in order to ensure appropriate representation of a range of views the proposed Working Group to examine the potential improvements to the links between community workers and Ward Councillors include both Executive and Non Executive Members.
3. That the feasibility of combining the proposed working groups as outlined in recommendations 1 and 2 above be examined.
4. That the proposals in the White Paper specifically the concept of Councils allocating a small budget to individual councillors and the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel's recommendation for ward-based decision-making bodies with delegated budgets be supported.

5. That in the meantime, the means by which Members have access to existing budgets be improved and the possibility of enabling Ward Members access by a bidding process to a small capital and/or revenue budget be examined.
6. That the outcome of consideration by the Executive of the report submitted together with the above recommendations be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

RESPECT AGENDA – FINAL REPORT – COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A report of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel was presented on the findings of the Panel following its assessment on the progress and benefits of introducing the Respect Agenda in Middlesbrough.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the submitted evidence:

- a) To report back to the Panel in January 2008 and present how families had progressed over the preceding 18 months, to measure the sustainability and assess if the early success of the project is maintained.
- b) That endeavours be undertaken to engage with Housing Associations and other private landlords within Middlesbrough to provide direct support to the Families Project.
- c) That the service explores the possibility of Trust status for the Families Project.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

WORKLESSNESS SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATE

A report of the Economic Development and Transport Scrutiny Panel was presented which outlined the Panel's response to an update received following its review of Worklessness.

Despite developments and efforts to deliver a better co-ordinated programme at a local level, unemployment had continued to rise.

The Board's attention was drawn to the following main conclusions and recommendation of the Panel as follows: -

Conclusions:

- a) from the information presented, the Panel was concerned that the introduction and the withdrawal of government initiatives, which can often be at short notice, heavily influenced the worklessness agenda and that this was quite frustrating;
- b) the Panel was also concerned that a year after the Panel's review and following the work that had been undertaken by the Council, by Middlesbrough Works and by the Government that there had been no improvement in the level of worklessness in Middlesbrough and that unemployment had continued to rise;
- c) that, with the approval of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, the update should be submitted to the Executive and bring to their attention the Panel's updated recommendation.

Recommendation:

- i) that based on the information presented to the Panel the Executive investigates ways that regeneration initiatives, which attract employers to the Town, can be linked to projects which assist workless people in Middlesbrough in order to tackle the rising levels of worklessness in Middlesbrough.

In commenting on the overall situation the Board referred to the Panel's previous report and in particular its findings on the need for improved co-ordination for employment initiatives across Middlesbrough in order to avoid duplication and increase their effectiveness.

ORDERED that the update and additional recommendation of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY – SELF EVALUATION EXERCISE

In a report of the Scrutiny Support Officer the Board was advised of an exercise which had been undertaken to examine and evaluate the operation of Middlesbrough's overview and scrutiny process using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Self Evaluation Framework which was based on four principles of good scrutiny as follows: -

- providing critical friend challenge;
- reflecting the public voice;
- leading and owning the process;
- making an impact.

The framework comprised a series of questions, based on the above principles, which required the evaluator to demonstrate evidence of achievement, identify areas of improvement and also highlight potential barriers to improvement.

A questionnaire based on the framework had been sent to all Members of the Council the results from which were summarised in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

Following the self-evaluation, an action plan had been produced as outlined in Appendix 2 of the report submitted, which identified areas where changed or revised processes were proposed. Such areas had been categorised as strengthening and improving systems and awareness.

ORDERED as follows: -

1. That the results of the Member questionnaire and self-evaluation exercise be noted.
2. That the proposed Action Plan as outlined in Appendix 2 of the report be approved.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests for scrutiny reviews had been received from the Executive, Executive Members, Non Executive Members and members of the public since the last meeting of the Board.

NOTED

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS

A report of the Chair of each Scrutiny Panel was submitted which outlined progress on current activities.

NOTED

CALL IN REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests had been received to call-in a decision.