

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 15 January 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Cox, Dryden, Ismail, Mawston, Rooney and Sanderson.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, J Ord, P Slocombe and E Williamson.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor N J Walker, Executive Member for Resources.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bishop, Biswas, G Rogers and Williams.

**** 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 18 December 2007 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

MAYOR

The Chair advised the Board that owing to a change of circumstance it had proved necessary for the Mayor to attend a meeting in London.

It was confirmed that arrangements had been made for the Mayor to attend the meeting of the Board scheduled for 12 February 2008.

NOTED

LIFE EXPECTANCY IN MIDDLESBROUGH – CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE – HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL FINAL REPORT

The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel gave an outline of the process of investigation and presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny review into Life Expectancy in Middlesbrough with a particular focus on cardiovascular disease.

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

- i) That the Primary Care Trust and the local authority investigate the possibility of granting substantial subsidies, on a recurring basis, to leisure services in the Town. This is with the aim of making them as cost free as possible for people, with specific reference being paid to young people and the financial barriers they face to becoming active.
- ii) That the free school holiday swimming is extended to encompass the entire year, with specific swimming pool slots being dedicated to young people's free swimming.
- iii) That the Primary Care Trust makes a detailed and public commitment to invest in a package of preventative services befitting of Middlesbrough's needs, as a Town with acute CVD problems.

Specifically:

- iv) That the Primary Care Trust, as the principal local Commissioner, takes steps to shape the local market by encouraging providers to develop and offer truly preventative services. Such services should be aimed at identifying high-risk groups

for CVD, then systematically and assertively offering those groups screening opportunities. This is with the ultimate aim of increasing the number of people effectively managing their CVD. This should, in time, reduce the number of people requiring access to the high cost (and personally traumatic) services provided in the acute sector. The Panel had heard that there could be as many people as 1200 people in Middlesbrough with undiagnosed CVD. It strikes the Panel that attempting to locate those people would be a good place to start.

- v) The Primary Care Trust investigates the possibility of providing 'drop in' screening opportunities in such locations as pubs, sports clubs, shopping centres, religious buildings, inclusive community buildings and even Middlesbrough Football Club on a matchday. Should capacity be a concern, it is suggested that the PCT look into commissioning external organisations to assist in handling the workload.
- vi) That the Executive, PCT, South Tees NHS Trust and Health Scrutiny Panel send a joint letter to the Secretary of State for Health calling on all appropriate foodstuffs to be labelled with the nutritional traffic light system, as a matter of legislation.

Members supported the recommendations and in particular referred to those in relation to leisure facilities in the light of the work being undertaken by the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel as part of its scrutiny investigation of Teenagers Hanging Around.

The Board's attention was drawn to the evidence compiled in relation to worklessness, economic inactivity and its relationship with poor health outcomes. The Panel had concluded that the links between worklessness and poor health demonstrated that whilst regeneration was crucial for the economic strength and well being of the Town it was also vital for the health of the Town.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

As part of the Board's remit in terms of holding the Executive to account a report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer was submitted which identified the most recent entries to the Executive's Forward Work Programme since the last report to the Board. It was pointed out that this would not negate Non Executive Member's ability to call-in a decision after it had been made.

It was confirmed that the next report to the Board would include additional information of the items included in the Executive Forward Programme.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests for scrutiny reviews had been received prior to the meeting 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

WASTE SERVICES REVIEW – ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL FINAL REPORT

The Chair on behalf of the Environment Scrutiny Panel presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny review into the Council's waste services.

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

- i) That the Executive notes that, owing to the timescale associated with completion of the Director of Environment's review of Waste Services, this report has been produced on an interim basis.
- ii) That the Director of Environment's finalised proposals on the review, including alternative options available, are considered by the Environment Scrutiny Panel prior to submission to the Executive.
- iii) That any future proposals to alter waste services operations, for example, any changes deemed necessary to increase recycling levels, are submitted to the Scrutiny Panel for consideration and comment.
- iv) That regular monitoring reports on the Council's recycling targets and rates are submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Panel, together with details of work being done to maximise public participation, particularly in areas where low returns are currently achieved.
- v) That arrangements are made to ensure that, wherever practicable, street cleansing takes place after refuse collection and not before.
- vi) That, subject to revised refuse collection rounds being implemented and working effectively, the Council's 'no side waste' policy is reaffirmed and appropriately publicised and enforced.
- vii) That further representations are made at a national level to the effect that recycled materials from the Energy From Waste Incinerator should be included in Council recycling targets.

The Board's attention was drawn to additional information regarding waste collection costs, which was circulated at the meeting.

It was noted that average costs of waste collection per household in Middlesbrough were approximately £56, which currently placed Middlesbrough in the bottom quartile of Best Value Performance Indicators. It was pointed out that the top quartile averaged £39.48 per household; the median figure £45.57; and the bottom quartile averaged £53.51.

Middlesbrough's waste collection costs were reported as being higher than the average bottom quartile authorities which had in part had led to the review of waste services and the need to reduce collection costs in line with the Council's low disposal costs for household waste.

In terms of waste disposal, Middlesbrough was in the top quartile at £26.22 per tonne, which was well under the top quartile average of £39.39; the median being £45.68 and the bottom quartile as £53.51. It was recognised that there was a need to reduce collection costs in line with the Council's low costs of disposal.

The Board noted in particular the ongoing work in terms of the options for improving the collection rounds the implementation of which was likely to be April/May 2008. Members acknowledged the need to maximise recycling participation rates.

Reference was also made to the implications of the national Waste Strategy for England 2007 and in particular the targets set by the Government in terms of recycling and composting of household waste and recovery of municipal waste which were considered unlikely to be significantly different from those previously identified. The Board concurred with the Panel's conclusion that the Council needed to continue to work towards providing the most efficient waste collection service whilst encouraging the reduction of waste and maximising the opportunities for recycling.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Environment Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive subject to the inclusion of the additional information as outlined and circulated at the meeting.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING OUTCOMES AND SURESTART – CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL FINAL REPORT

The Chair reported that in view of a change of circumstance the Final Report of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in relation to Early Years Learning Outcomes and Surestart would be considered at a subsequent meeting of the Board.

The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel at its meeting held on 8 January 2008 had agreed to have a further meeting on this matter prior to consideration by the Board.

NOTED

REVENUE SUPPORT GRANT SETTLEMENT 2008/2009 TO 2010/2111

The Director of Resources submitted a report, which provided an outline of the proposals, set out in the 2008/2009 Revenue Support Grant Consultation paper.

By way of background information an outline was given of the national position. To assist local government in medium term financial planning, the proposed level of Central Government Revenue Funding (Formula Grant) proposed to be made available to individual authorities over the next three years had been set out. Local Authority specific grants allocations were also being issued over the three year period.

The system of Formula Grant consisted of four blocks, namely; Relative Needs; Relative Resources; Central Allocation; Floor Damping; details of which were outlined in the report in respect of 2008/2009 to 2010/2011.

The report gave a summary of Middlesbrough's Formula Grant entitlement for 2008/2009 and 2010/2011. The increase in Formula Grant on a directly comparable basis represented 4.5% in 2008/2009; 2.9% in 2009/2010 and 2.3% in 2010/2011. In accordance with the revised Formula Grant Middlesbrough was a net contributor to the damping arrangements of £7.5 million over the three-year period.

Population assumptions had been included in the future settlements and an average annual loss of in between 700 and 750 had been assumed which compared to previous assumptions of 1,300 average net annual loss in population.

It was noted that there were a number of changes within the Settlement which had had an impact on the assumptions within the existing Medium Term Financial Plan a summary of which was outlined in the report. Such changes mainly related to the transfer from specific grants to Formula Funding under Children Families and Learning, Social Care and Environment & Neighbourhood Services.

The Board acknowledged the following comments outlined in the report: -

- a) the national settlement represented a difficult settlement for Local Government;
- b) significant resources had not been made available within the Formula Grant for Social Services (Social Care and Children Families and Learning) to meet demand led pressures and independent sector price increases;
- c) further work and analysis was ongoing with particular regard to specific grant allocations.

The Board supported the Council's representations made on the consultation paper in respect of the following: -

- a) the extent to which resources were being withheld from Middlesbrough under the damping arrangements;
- b) request for additional funding for Social Services (Children and Adults) demand led pressures.

Members noted that although the settlement for Middlesbrough was below that predicted in the Medium Term over the three-year period by Financial Plan, it had been considered unnecessary to significantly change the Budget Strategy. The variance was reported as approximately £254,000 over the three-year period.

NOTED

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2008/2009 TO 2011/2012 – REVENUE BUDGET 2008/2009

The Director of Resources presented a report, which outlined the medium term financial position for 2008/2009 to 2011/2012 and set out the estimated draft 2008/2009 revenue budget.

As the 2006/2007 Final Outturn was reported to the Executive in June 2007 all services had maintained their expenditure within budgets allocated to them. Overall the Council had made approximately £306,000 net savings against its General Fund for 2006/2007 and efficiency savings of £3.7 million had been identified and applied during the year.

The report outlined the Council's revenue budget for 2007/2008 at £117.7 million. Temporary balances of £1.143 million had been utilised to support the overall expenditure level of the Council. A Council Tax increase of 3.6% for Middlesbrough Council had been applied.

In setting the budget as outlined in Appendix A of the report, identified structural budget issues had been addressed with no cuts in services and extra investment of £3.5 million had been placed in key service areas including £1.9 million (Vulnerable Adults and Children); £0.2 million (street warden service); £0.7 million (regeneration); £0.4 million (investment in the Environment); £0.7 million (leisure, sports and health); and £0.2 million (other).

Summary information was provided of the projected year end position by service. It was reported that Children, Families and Learning had identified deliverable savings of £396,000, which had reduced the requirement for the temporary use of balances from the approved level of £1.143 million to £747,000.

Environment and Regeneration had identified net-spending pressures of £134,000 and £57,000 respectively. It was confirmed that measures were in place to help ensure that the pressures were contained within the individual services by 31 March 2008.

The Comprehensive Spending Review for the period 2008/2009 to 2010/2011 outlined a requirement to make 3% cashable efficiency savings. The target for Middlesbrough was reported as approximately £3.5 million worth of savings. It was confirmed that proposals would be identified as part of the budget setting process.

The Board's attention was drawn to the main variances from the current year's budget as summarised in a table contained within the submitted report.

A Medium Term Financial Plan outlining a broad financial position for the period 2008/2009 to 2011/2012 had been prepared on the basis of current information. The level of resources estimated to be available had been based on the Spending Review released by Central Government on 9 October 2007 together with an assessment of the level of Central Government revenue funding being made available under the 6 December 2007 Local Government Finance Settlements.

In preparing the 2008/2009 projected revenue budget and medium term financial plan, the report outlined the principles, consistent with previous year's budget strategies and statements, which had been adopted.

Members supported the intention for the Board to have an opportunity at a special meeting to be held on 7 February 2007 to express a view on the range of proposals in order to achieve the required savings. Such proposals were likely to include a reduction in the Pension contribution rate, a review of the Medium Term Financial Plan and gross Service efficiency savings.

NOTED

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

ANY OTHER BUSINESS – SPECIAL MEETINGS

The Chair reminded Members of a number of additional meetings as follows: -

- a) Joint meeting of the Board with Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel on 21 January 2008 at 11.00 a.m. relating to the Local Development Framework;
- b) Joint meeting with the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel on 29 January 2008 at 4.30 p.m. in relation to the LSP and LAAs;
- c) Meeting to be held on 7 February 2008 at 2.00 p.m. to consider a report on the Review of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2008/2009 to 2010/2011 and the Revenue Budget 2008/2009.

NOTED