

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD AND AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to which Members of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel had been invited to attend was held on 29 January 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Biswas, Cole, Dryden, Mawston, G Rogers, Rooney and Williams.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, P Clark, A Crawford, B McGowan, J Ord, L Southerton, K Stokes and E Williamson.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:**

Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel:
Councillors Elder and Purvis.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bishop, Ismail and J Walker

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS – CLUSTERS

The Chair welcomed Mr L Southerton, Chief Executive of Middlesbrough Partnership who gave a general introduction on the extent of the work of the LSP. There was recognition that whilst work had focussed on different ways of delivering limited resources in relatively small geographical areas of the community there still remained a challenge to collectively tackle the overriding problems facing the majority of the population of the Town.

A report of the Director of Regeneration was presented which provided background information to Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) which had been set up following the Local Government Act 2000 and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) introduced in 2004.

Initial guidance in 2001 expected that each area would develop its own arrangements for LSPs. The key areas initially identified for LSPs were:

- Preparation of the Community Strategy
- Co-ordination of plans, policies and initiatives;
- Supporting local authorities in areas with Public Service Agreements;
- Development of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

An indication was given of the broad range of public service representatives (approximately 40) on the current LSP.

LAAs were agreements between central government and local government (represented by the local authority and partners through the LSP) focusing on high level priority outcomes. Guidance identified four themes referred to as the LAA 'blocks'. It was pointed out that Middlesbrough did not use the structure of the four LAA blocks but based its LAA around the existing Community Strategy themes; creating safer and stronger communities; children and learning; health and social care; environment; transport; and economic vitality; and the range of sub groups for such themes.

Guidance for both LSPs and LAAs highlighted the importance of community engagement as part of such processes. The Clusters provided a form of residents participation based on the network of community councils; one representative from each area on the Middlesbrough Partnership Board; two representatives on the Middlesbrough Partnership Executive; and one from each area were invited to attend Action Groups.

The key areas of the Clusters were identified as follows:-

- to enable Community Councils to influence the work of the Middlesbrough Partnership and facilitate a two-way communication process between the Middlesbrough Partnership and Community Councils with the Cluster area;
- a more general area of work was to encourage Community Councils to work collectively for the good of their neighbourhood and the Town, and to contribute to achieving the vision in the Middlesbrough Community Strategy.

Members were advised that Middlesbrough Partnership, the LSP, was currently reviewing its partnership arrangements to ensure that it could meet the requirements of current guidance. It was felt that this would be influenced by the recent 'place-shaping' document: 'Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities – Statutory Guidance: Draft for Consultation'.

It was noted that the final guidance would clarify the role of local authorities and councillors, and the expectations of how they work with partners.

Reference was made to ongoing work with Cluster members to consider the way they work and how this related to the broader agendas of both localities and the LSP.

Middlesbrough's first LAA was completed in March 2007 to cover the period 2007-2010. It was confirmed however that LAAs had now become statutory, and a new format was required with an emphasis on 35 improvement targets and 16 attainment targets (from the Department of Children, Schools and Families) although there was still the requirement to report on a total of 198 indicators. There was also the opportunity to develop additional local indicators.

A shortlist was currently being prepared taking into account a number of factors such as the availability of baseline information, avoiding duplication, and identifying Government priorities. The outcome of such a process would be the subject of further discussion by Members including Scrutiny Panels and the Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was anticipated that the LAA would be completed by June 2008.

The process that was being used for the development of the LAAs was also being used to inform the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy. As both the first LAA and 2005 Community Strategy were current documents the process was being viewed as a refresh rather than requiring an overall rewrite.

Although guidance had been produced on several areas, clarification was required on a number of issues and further local discussion was required prior to final decisions being made.

The development of the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy were inter-related and needed to be considered for the impact they had on each other. The aim was for the Sustainable Community Strategy to set out the long term vision for the Town including high-level priorities, the LAA to set out the shorter term (three year) targets, underpinned by local plans and for the LSP to provide partnership approach to setting the priorities and to performance management.

Members sought clarification on a number of areas and during the ensuing deliberations made a number of observations including:-

- a) although the current composition of Middlesbrough Partnership reflected the focus on economic vitality the representation was considered to be predominantly representatives from the public sector;
- b) the suggestion for representation on the LSP to be the subject of future examination was supported;
- c) in response to comments made regarding the extent of the powers of the Partnership it was indicated that whilst the nature of the community representation was an issue, the LSP with the exception of utilising NRF funding was not in a position to be responsible for significant expenditure and its main thrust was that of an advisory role;

- d) the lack of opportunities for non-Executive Members to influence the decision-making process was a concern and the current arrangements of the LSP and Clusters were seen as exacerbating the situation;
- e) there was acknowledgement of the need for ongoing work to ensure that there were robust communication channels;
- f) in response to concerns that there may be conflicting priorities it was indicated that there was no statutory function for the LSP to have organisations such as the Police but current arrangements relied on their goodwill and commitment for such participation and allowed the opportunity for such groups to give their perspective on the issues raised;
- g) the opportunity for Non-Executive Members to influence the development of additional local indicators for the LAA by means of the scrutiny process was supported.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the Offices be thanked for the information which was noted.
2. That reports concerning the LAA be submitted to Scrutiny Panels and Overview and Scrutiny Board as outlined.

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT – COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT – COUNCILS SELF ASSESSMENT

A report of the Head of Corporate Performance was presented on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and the Council's Corporate Assessment.

The key element in deciding the overall star rating that a council achieved in CPA was the Corporate Assessment (CA) which was calculated using the rules as shown in table 1 of the report submitted.

The Council's last CA had been a mini-review undertaken in April 2006 following which the Council achieved a 4-star rating. The next CA and JAR would be in March/April 2008 and would be the last as from 2009 the Audit Commission's methodology for assessing council performance would change.

The Audit Commission stated that the purpose of the CA was to 'examine how the council is working corporately, and with its partners, to improve services and deliver improved outcomes for local people' by:

- examining the political, managerial and community leadership of the council;
- measures how well councils understand their local communities;
- assesses how well the above understanding translated into councils' ambitions and priorities;
- judges council's capacity to deliver such ambitions and priorities and their achievements.

As part of its judgement on a council's achievements, corporate assessment reports were included on the contribution of the Council to the quality of outcomes for children and young people. The JAR which was undertaken at the same time as the CA provided the judgements for this aspect of the assessment.

The starting point for the CA was evidence-gathering by the Audit Commission which included the requirement for the Council to produce a self-assessment in accordance with the AC's Key Lines of Enquiry. Details were provided on the structure and content of the self-assessment and key stages of the process within the timetable as outlined culminating in a report published on 22 July 2008.

The CA was a scored judgement consisting of five themes the last of which had five sub-themes:

- ambition

- prioritisation
- capacity
- performance management
- achievement: (sustainable communities (including transport)), safer and stronger communities, healthier communities, older people, children and young people).

The rules for calculating overall corporate assessment score were outlined in table 2 of the report submitted.

The work undertaken by the Council on a day-to-day basis as part of good management practice formed the basis of the evidence required by the CA. Most of the preparation for the CA was around ensuring that the work carried out by Members, partners and officers was evidenced to the inspectors and the outcomes achieved documented. Such preparations included:-

- providing evidence to support good practice (self-assessment and supporting documents);
- ensuring Members, stakeholders and officers were given appropriate information regarding the CA;
- housekeeping arrangements.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted.