

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 7 April 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Cox, Dryden, C Hobson, J Hobson, Ismail, Purvis and Sanderson.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, A Crawford, S Joscelyne, J Ord, N Sayer, P Stephens and E Williamson.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor Budd, Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, Mawston, J A Walker and Williams.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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 2 and 10 March 2009 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS – ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

In a report of the Scrutiny Support Officer the Board was reminded of arrangements for individual Members of the Executive to attend meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and update Members on their respective work in terms of their aims, aspirations, objectives, priorities and any emerging issues. The process was part of the arrangements of 'holding the Executive to account' and also provided the opportunity for the Board to identify or highlight any issues of concern.

NOTED AND APPROVED

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Budd to the meeting who focussed on the main aims, objectives and emerging issues of the portfolio of Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic and Development.

In his opening remarks the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development acknowledged that such a portfolio covered a wide range of issues and that the current financial climate had significantly impacted upon a number of areas since the report to the Board in the last Municipal Year.

Specific reference was made to the current position in relation to a number of priority areas including the following: -

Housing:

- changed remit of Homes and Communities Agency;
- need to examine different methods and partnership arrangements in an endeavour to progress affordable/social housing and to revitalise private development;
- a number of different problems needed to be tackled in relation to developments at Middlehaven, Grove Hill and Gresham areas;

Planning Service:

- continue to pursue improved quality and urban design although it was acknowledged that development had slowed down;

Planning and Regeneration Programmes:

- continuation of publicly funded schemes such as Building Schools for the Future;
- BoHo managed workspace to assist local businesses and creation of jobs ;
- Platform Arts in refurbished buildings at Middlesbrough Railway Station providing units for artists and sculptors;
- although development at Middlehaven was not as originally envisaged, work was progressing on a replacement hostel and an indication was given of the relocation of a number of other buildings with the Dock location being the last area to be developed;
- refurbishment of Town Hall complex with a view to improving the Concert Hall to assist with the long term aspirations of developing the cultural regeneration of the Town Centre;
- reference was made to community development and ongoing employment training with specific reference to the expansion of the apprenticeship scheme;

Town Centre:

- the development of the Town Centre in terms of the expansion of the retail and office sectors was regarded as extremely important in raising the profile of Middlesbrough and assisting with the creation of jobs;
- it was acknowledged however that some of the developments were not likely to proceed or progress had been hindered by the current economic climate;

Culture:

- as previously identified an indication was given of ongoing projects such as Platform Arts, Gallery for local artists at Melrose House, MIMA and Centre Square;
- this was seen as an area for future expansion in terms of improving employment opportunities;

Libraries:

- reference was made to the current efficiency review of the library provision and the recent scrutiny review regarding the present service and possible ways of rationalising the current provision;

Tees Valley – City Region Agenda:

- reference was made to the application for City Region pilot area status which remained a huge challenge but would provide more flexibility in terms of regeneration, housing and transport in line with regional economic strategy;
- recognition that there was still much work to be done in terms of the skills and training agenda and for the right message to get across in terms of the increasing opportunities in the Town;
- reference was also made to the importance of the development and role of the third sector.

The Board discussed and sought clarification on a number of the areas highlighted by Councillor Budd.

In discussing the importance of progressing initiatives in terms of job and training opportunities reference was made to an innovative programme to secure employment and training opportunities with particular regard to young people being pursued by Knowsley Council. It was acknowledged that although much work had been undertaken it was considered that there needed to be a rationalisation of the numerous job creation agencies and a more holistic approach adopted.

Concerns were expressed at the difficulties in raising regional status especially with an increasing number of Government agencies moving to the Tyneside area.

Although a number of factors had impacted on the development of a night time economy it was noted that the main shops over the Christmas period had been in the top 20% of their groups nationally. It was noted that although much work had been undertaken in attracting people to the Town Centre such as Thursday late night opening to which 20 stores had signed up to and promotion of various events in the Centre Square additional facilities were required such as that of a hotel.

It was acknowledged that although improvements had been made in recent years in promoting Middlesbrough there was still a recognised need to develop different ways of raising awareness to the positive aspects of the Town in the regional and national setting.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development be thanked for the information provided.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – IMPROVING LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES – REVIEW OF COMMUNITY CENTRES

As part of the scrutiny process and in a report of the Executive Office Manager it was reported that the Executive had considered the Board's comments on final reports in relation to the above.

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

NOTED

EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

As part of the Board's remit in terms of holding the Executive to account Members considered a report of the Executive Office Manager which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive as outlined in Appendix A of the report submitted.

NOTED

STRATEGIC PLAN 2008 TO 2011 – REVISION 2009 TO 2010

A report of the Head of Corporate Performance was presented which outlined the agreed structure and timetable for the 2009/2010 revision of the Council's Strategic Plan 2008-2011.

In response to the new performance framework introduced in April 2008 for local government and its partners the Council had revised its first Strategic Plan one year ahead of schedule and had developed a new plan for the period 2008-2011.

The 2008-2011 Strategic Plan had been structured and published in four separate parts however it had been agreed at an Individual Executive Decision Making Meeting (Deputy Mayor) held on 19 March 2009 that the revised Plan for 2009/2010 be published as a single document so that it remained fit for purpose.

The Board was advised of the rationale of such a proposal and emerging issues considered in relation to: -

- Sustainable Community Strategy/refreshed Local Area Agreement;
- Revised 'Fit for purpose' priorities;
- Responses to CPA and Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The report outlined the proposed reorganised 2008/2009 version of the Strategic Plan as set out in Appendix A and the timetable for the development of the 2009/2010 Plan as shown in Appendix B.

Scrutiny Panels had and would be considering the draft content of the thematic sections of the Strategic Plan during March to April 2009. It was intended that a draft of the Strategic Plan would be submitted to the Board at its meeting to be held on 5 May 2009 for consideration prior to approval by the Executive and Council in June 2009.

NOTED

EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT – LEVEL 4 SELF ASSESSMENT

A report of the Director of Human Resources was presented the purpose of which was to:

- outline the background to the Equality Standard for Local Government and the associated assessment processes;
- set out the approach taken since achieving level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government in May 2008;
- outline the approach taken toward the achievement of level 4;
- present the Council's self-assessment (Appendix 1) agreed at an Individual Executive Decision Making Meeting (Deputy Mayor) held on 19 March 2009 which outlined how the Council met the requirements of level 4 of the Standard.

It was noted that in terms of the next steps to be taken a small number of actions had been identified as a result of the self-assessment process. To ensure that such actions were fully addressed an action plan had been developed which would be taken forward as part of the Council's preparations for attainment of 'excellence' within the revised Equality Standard for Local Government.

The main actions related to work already being undertaken to strengthen the depth of monitoring information processes within the Council and a number of actions had been identified to ensure national best practice continued to be followed.

The Council had set a pass mark of 80% for each element of the evidence gathering process and every service area assessed had achieved at least 80%. As part of the Council's continued commitment to equality and diversity, service areas would utilise the findings of the evidence gathering process to address those areas where they had scored less than 100%. Such actions would be incorporated into Service Area Diversity Action Plans as appropriate.

It was noted that from April 2009 a revised version of the Equality Standard for Local Government would come into use called the Equality Framework for Local Government. Details were provided of the new framework with only three levels, which had been designed to link into the forthcoming Single Equality Bill and the requirements of the Comprehensive Area Assessment process.

The Board was advised that by declaring level 4, the Council had been classified as 'moving toward excellence' within the new model. Such a score would be applicable for two years from April 2009 after which time the Council would be required to undergo external assessment against level 3 of the new framework.

Members sought assurances that measures were in place to assist in achieving the targets in relation to the percentage of BME employees (BVPI 017a) and the percentage of women in senior positions (BVP1 11a). It was noted that in comparison with other authorities Middlesbrough Council ranked in the top quartile for its performance against such targets.

In terms of the percentage of BME employees (BVPI 017a) it was confirmed that all employees had to undertake diversity training and a range of measures had been developed in order to tackle underperformance with regard to such targets. Such action included the Positive Steps initiative and improved workforce planning information to enable more detailed analysis of trends to be undertaken as part of the Annual Workforce Profile report.

In relation to target (BVPI 156) in respect of buildings accessible to people with a disability it was noted that a new dedicated post had been established in this regard.

NOTED

AUDIOLOGY SERVICES – FINAL REPORT UPDATE – HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL

Further to the submission of the final report of the Health Scrutiny Panel on Audiology Services to the Board on 1 July 2008 the Chair of the Panel submitted a report which outlined the significant progress and improvements which had been achieved as outlined in a progress report to the Panel at its meeting held on 5 February 2009.

The Panel had been pleased with the excellent progress which had been achieved with particular regard to waiting times relating to audiology services.

The Board concurred that it was a good example of the positive impact that Scrutiny could have. Scrutiny had played an important role in ensuring that attention had been focussed on an area of concern to local services and facilitated discussions on where problems were faced and improvements could be made. The end result to the process was that local residents were now able to access the services they needed much quicker than they could previously.

ORDERED that the report be referred to the Executive.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS – GEORGE HARDWICK FOUNDATION CENTRE

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

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report, which outlined a request from a member of the public for an investigation to be undertaken into services for carers in Middlesbrough.

The reasons for the request were reported as follows: -

“We are writing this e-mail to voice our concerns about the George Hardwick Foundation Centre which is closing at the end of this month. The article in the Evening Gazette on the 12th March 2009 states that at least 300+carers used the centre each week. Carers should be given the choice of visiting the centre in Middlesbrough or outreach services into the carer’s home. Some carers would prefer to visit a centre as they spend a lot of time in their properties looking after their disabled families and friends and it gives the carers a break.”

Taking into account the agreed criteria the Board considered the appropriateness of undertaking a scrutiny review into the suggested topic and had specific regard to a recent transfer of service and improvements in respect of the Outreach Service which was partly funded by the Primary Care Trust.

ORDERED that a scrutiny investigation be not undertaken at this time.

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 arrangements had been made for a meeting of the Board to be held on 16 April 2009 at 3.30 p.m. to consider a Call-In in respect of a decision taken at an Individual Meeting of the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development held on 26 March 2009 relating to the refurbishment of the Middlesbrough Town Hall complex.

NOTED