

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 22 September 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Dryden, Ismail, Kerr, Khan, McPartland (as substitute for Councillor Cole), Purvis and Sanderson.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, A Crawford, J Ord, N Sayer, P Slocombe and P Stephens.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor Carr, Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, Elder, C Hobson, J Hobson and Mawston.

** DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Interest
Councillor Brunton	Personal/Non Prejudicial	Agenda item 4 (a) relating to school exclusions in so far as it related to Complementary Education Management Board –School Governor.

** MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 25 August 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 –CHILDREN FAMILIES AND LEARNING

The Chair welcomed Councillor Carr, Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning to the meeting who focussed on attainment and safeguarding issues.

Members were advised that whilst the overall figures for GCSE results had improved by 2% it was recognised that further advances were required as Middlesbrough was still shown to be behind the national figures. It was acknowledged that there were fluctuating levels of improvement across the schools and there was ongoing work to secure further progress especially in relation to those schools which had shown to have lower levels of attainment. A high level of support was also being provided at key stage 2 level where there had been a decrease in the percentage of pupils achieving level 4. Reference was also made to a gap of 15% between the levels of attainment between boys and girls at that level.

In relation to the Building Schools for the Future programme specific reference was made to the planned merger of the Acklam Base Schools and the setting up and running of a new school by the Endeavour Educational Trust.

An important aspect of the work currently ongoing related to primary and secondary schools working closely together to ensure effective transition for pupils.

The importance of the role of a Governor in taking an active part and challenging in terms of day to day responsibilities was acknowledged.

In terms of safeguarding the Board was advised of significant increases in the number of children subject of protection plans and children looked after over the last twelve months. At the same time last year there had been 207 children looked after which had recently increased to 305 reflecting a 15% increase. It was acknowledged that such a position placed much pressure on the department's budget with specific regard to foster care, complex care and residential care. Reference was made to the increasing number of foster carers (30) although it was recognised that it would take some time to fully introduce such foster carers to the system.

An indication was given of significant ongoing work in an endeavour to identify the cause of the current situation which often involved complex and multi-faceted circumstances. As part of the continuing service case review measures had been taken to ensure more effective record keeping of such cases.

The Board discussed the issues raised and sought clarification on a number of areas including the following: -

- a) examples were given of schemes and events which were being pursued in Middlesbrough and elsewhere to ease the transition of pupils from a primary school to a different setting and experiences of a secondary school;
- b) details were given of current arrangements in relation to exclusions including the differences between temporary and permanent exclusions and recent changes to Government rules relating to funding;
- c) specific reference was made to challenges made regarding the marking in relation to GCSEs which after subsequent action last year had resulted in an 1% overall increase - it was noted that the final set of results for this year would be published in February 2010;
- d) although the Department had successfully recruited newly qualified social workers it was acknowledged that it would take some time before they were able to undertake the more complex cases;
- e) it was noted that four agency staff had been retained in order to cope with the increasing pressures;
- f) details were given of changed processes and more intensive management of cases which as previously indicated highlighted the importance of up to date records on individual cases;
- g) further details would be provided on the outcome of the review of the Sensory and Impaired service.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning be thanked for the information provided.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – EMPTY SHOPS AND PROPERTIES

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 the Environment Scrutiny Panel's Final Report in relation to the Condition of Empty Shops and Properties.

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

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2010/2011 TO 2013/2014 – REVENUE BUDGET 2010/2011

The Director of Resources presented a report, which outlined the medium term financial position for 2010/2011 to 2013/2014 and set out the estimated draft 2010/2011 revenue budget.

The report had been based on a number of factors including: the 2008/2009 Final Outturn; the 2009/2010 revenue budget of £131.0 million; a Council tax increase of 4.5%; identified structural budget issues addressed; projected year end position and an agreed Action Plan to address identified 2009/2010 spending pressures; requirements of Comprehensive Spending Review for the period 2008/2009 to 2010/2011; and local government finance settlement.

The 2010/2011 projected revenue budget (£139.816 million) was outlined in Appendix A of the report submitted.

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

A Medium Term Financial Plan outlining a broad financial position for the period 2010/2011 to 2013/2014 had been prepared on the basis of current information. The MTFP projected the levels of resources and commitments across the next financial year and a further three-year period, and was used to support strategic policy and a service planning across the Council.

Appendix B of the report submitted set out the expected position over the Medium Term 2010/2011 – 2013/2014 (at 2.5 % assumed Council Tax increase).

The report set out the principles adopted in preparing the 2010/2011 projected revenue budget and Medium Term Financial Plan and consultation process to be implemented.

The following projections for potential gaps had been based on the information currently available:-

- a) at a 2.5% Council tax increase, £5.775 million was projected for 2010/2011;
- b) at 3.6% Council tax increase, £5.234 million was projected for 2010/2011.

Services would be required to consider how the Council could make the 'best use' of resources and how unit costs could be improved by:

- reducing inputs for the same outputs (productivity gains)
- reducing price for the same outputs (procurement led reduced costs)
- greater outputs with the same inputs (increased performance)
- increased outputs exceed increased inputs (performance driven investment).

Members discussed the current situation and sought clarification on a number of areas. Specific reference was made to the identified potential pressures and efficiency savings relating to the Supporting Children and Young People Community Strategy theme. Such pressures had been based on assumptions in respect of levels of demand. It was confirmed that a provision of £0.5 million had been built into the medium term financial plan for the impact of planned changes to

Foster Carer allowances. Such action was anticipated to produce ongoing efficiency savings that would be incorporated into revised versions of the medium term financial plan.

NOTED

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER ONE 2009/2010

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive was presented which provided an overview of the Council's performance at Quarter One 2009/2010.

The 2009/2010 Strategic Plan set out the Council's key performance targets (including the key improvement priorities for Middlesbrough identified in the Local Area Agreement 2008-2011) and the actions it planned to take during the year to contribute to the achievement of such targets.

The report summarised the Council's performance against its key targets and planned improvement actions at the end of Quarter One 2009/2010.

The Board considered the key points and in particular referred to the LAA and the main under-performing theme of 'Supporting Children and Young People' where the majority of indicators relating to educational attainment, whilst in general terms were improving year-on-year they were not on target. It was noted that the provisional attainment results for the academic year 2008/2009 released in August 2009 would be discussed in detail in the Quarter Two report.

It was noted that performance against a number of safeguarding NIs remained off target, due largely to difficulties in processing the increased volume of referrals resulting from national pressures.

NOTED

OPEN PLAN ESTATES – FINAL REPORT – ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL

A Final Report of the Economic Development and Transport Scrutiny Panel had been circulated regarding the Panel's review of Open Plan Estates.

ORDERED that consideration of the report be deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to be held on 20 October 2009.

SCRUTINY REVIEW – IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Further to the meeting of the Board held on 25 August 2009 the Assistant Scrutiny Officer presented a report which outlined the current position regarding the implementation of agreed Executive actions in respect of a review of Speed Cameras.

Members had previously been advised that owing to the absence of the responsible officer as a result of long-term sickness delays had occurred in formulating a policy for the use of crash collapsible pillars. The Board had suggested that an alternative officer be nominated to implement the recommendation and a revised target be agreed.

The Department of Transport and Design Services had given an assurance that the above work would be undertaken by the end of the calendar year and that the Group Leader for Road Safety and Traffic had been designated the responsible officer.

NOTED

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY- CONSULTATION

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented a report concerning the Department of Communities and Local Government Consultation: Strengthening Local Democracy, which set out a range of measures to promote democratic renewal and strengthen the power and responsibility of local government.

The views of the public, local authorities, public and private sector organisations, voluntary and third sector organisations were being sought on the proposals.

Building on the current arrangements in place, the Consultation paper proposed to strengthen the existing scrutiny powers as follows: -

- a) making the description of scrutiny powers more explicit about local council's role in scrutinising expenditure on delivery of local public services in an area;
- b) bringing a range of local public services fully under the scrutiny powers of local authorities with a focus on what matters for local people and local communities;
- c) extending scrutiny powers in relation to LAA partners by removing the current limitations to the scrutiny of specific LAA targets, and extending scrutiny powers more generally to a wider range of bodies whose activities may be crucial to the development of the area;
- d) extending scrutiny powers to enable committees to require attendance by officers or board members for partner bodies to give evidence at scrutiny hearings (similar to the powers already in existence for health and police).

A summary of the relationship between current and potential future local government scrutiny powers had been included in Appendix A and the Consultation questions were outlined in Appendix B of the report submitted.

It was noted that the Consultation period ended on 2 October 2009.

ORDERED that the proposals be supported and a response compiled and be submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS – PEST CONTROL SERVICES

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

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report, which outlined a request from a Non Executive Member to consider undertaking an investigation into Pest Control Services.

Taking into account the agreed criteria the Board considered the appropriateness of undertaking a scrutiny review into the suggested topic.

ORDERED that a scrutiny investigation be undertaken by the Environment Scrutiny Panel into Pest Control Services.

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS – PATIENT TRANSPORT SERVICES

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

It was suggested that the Executive be advised of the update regarding Patient Transport Services as recently provided to the Health Scrutiny Panel.

NOTED AND APPROVED

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL – TACKLING THE RECESSION LOCALLY

The Chair presented a report, which outlined a proposal for the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel to undertake a scrutiny investigation into the actions taken locally to tackle the recession.

In overall terms the recession was considered to be the worst in 60 years which had impacted on employment and new investment the consequences of which were felt both nationally and locally and had required Government intervention to assist recovery.

Over the past 12 months, public, private and voluntary sectors had worked to tackle the affects of the recession. Regional Grand Committees were being held to concentrate on regional economy and recovery.

The suggested remit of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was to include the following:-

- to assess the Council's Economic Strategy and both the actions taken to date and those intended which were aimed at contributing towards local recovery;
- examine the strategy's effectiveness and how it was shaped to address the issues locally as a consequence of the recession;
- explore the Council's involvement with partners to assist in both limiting the impact locally and planning for recovery.

AGREED that the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel undertakes a scrutiny investigation as outlined into the actions taken and proposals to tackle the recession locally.

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

NOTED