

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 15 December 2009.

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

OFFICERS: J Bennington, C Breheny, G Brown, P Clark, A Crawford, S Joscelyne, J Ord, J Shiel, P Slocombe and P Stephens.

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

**** PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** Celia Craig, Director, Assurance & Advisory,
Deloitte & Touche LLP.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, Elder and Ismail.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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 17 November 2009 were submitted.

It was confirmed that an update report following a review of the Executive Forward Work Programme would be submitted to the next scheduled meeting of the Board to be held on 12 January 2010.

NOTED AND APPROVED

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 – TRANSPORT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Rooney, Executive Member for Transport to the meeting who reported upon on some of the main objectives and current priority areas of work.

Reference was made to a number of projects, which focused on improving access to the Town more easily and the promotion of sustainable forms of transport to reduce the reliance on the use of car thus assisting with congestion, increasing accessibility and reducing pollution.

An indication was given of some success in terms of personal travel plans such as attracting funding in relation to improvements to existing rail services, the provision of a new rail halt at James Cook University Hospital and more frequent bus services. Details of the final outcome of a bid for bus improvements would be known in January 2010. Specific reference was made to significant improvements at Middlesbrough Railway Station including the refurbishment of lifts

and improved access for the disabled. A multi-changing room had also been provided at Middlesbrough Bus Station.

The Board was advised of a £2.7 million funding package of improvements, which hopefully would be mainly funded by a Heritage Lottery Bid as part of the 100 years celebrations in respect of the Transporter Bridge in October 2011. Some of the suggested improvements included the installation of lifts, upgrading of IT equipment in the Visitors Centre and the commissioning of artworks on and around the bridge.

Reference was made to the promotion of specific projects around sustainability such as the bike loan scheme, which had received some requests but had taken longer to process than first envisaged.

Leaflets had been issued regarding the Linthorpe Road West 20 MPH Zone scheme and a good response had been received to the scheme which was hoped would be extended to other parts of the Town. Such schemes were linked to a Safer Routes to School scheme which had been developed as part of the Healthy Towns programme. The aim of the scheme was to make it easier and safer for children to travel to the school on foot or by cycle.

The implications for the Council in terms of the consultation document following Sir Michael Pitt's report regarding the management of flood risk were being assessed. A number of options were being explored including the use of door barriers particularly in vulnerable locations.

In response to questions regarding the latest position with regard to the Marton Road Corridor improvements the Executive Member for Transport confirmed that information would be presented in the business report to the next meeting of the Council and gave an assurance that Councillors would be kept informed accordingly.

In discussing the proposed new rail halt at James Cook University Hospital the need to maintain and pursue good alternative forms of transport such as park and ride and the provision of appropriate pedestrian walkways to the hospital were reiterated.

In terms of the provision of cycleways reference was made to ongoing work in relation to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

In supporting the Council's vision as set out in the Transport Plan it was recognised that given the overall financial constraints there was little flexibility and inevitably there would be a need to examine and determine a list of prioritised list of schemes.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Transport be thanked for the information provided.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – LOVE MIDDLESBROUGH?

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 final report of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel in relation to Love Middlesbrough?

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

NOTED

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2010/2011 TO 2013/2014

The Director of Resources presented a report, which provided an update on the medium term financial position for 2010/2011 to 2013/2014.

A full review of the Medium Term Financial Plan had been undertaken based on updated inflation/pay award assumptions; the 2009/2010 2nd Quarters projected outturn and a current assessment of available central government support.

The report outlined a number of variances, which included the following: -

- a) provision for pay awards and inflation taking into account the 2009/2010 pay settlement, government statements regarding public sector pay and current retail/consumer price index increases;
- b) revised inflation assumptions had allowed for a 1.5% pay award in future years, a 2% inflationary increase for running costs and 25 for grants, fees and recharges;
- c) provision had also been made for the impact of increased foster carers allowances and concessionary fares;
- d) all growth items had been reviewed and the following amendments had been included in the revised Medium Term Financial Plan:-
 - following a review of the current demand on services for the elderly alongside the age profile of Middlesbrough an additional £1.811 million had been identified in 2010/2011;
 - further additional safeguarding costs of £0.503 million in respect of Looked After Children had been identified within Children, Families and Learning;
 - a review of all other growth items across services had shown increases the estimated net impact of which was reported as £63,000.

Following a review of the Medium Term financial position as shown in Appendix A of the report submitted, the overall gap had been revised to £6.784 million in 2010/2011, £9.356 in 2011/2012, £11.542 in 2012/2013 and £13.956 in 2013/2014.

The Board was advised of three key areas, which had been identified for consideration to address the gap as follows: -

- i) Partnership Savings (£1 million target): Services within the annual contract with Mouchel for Direct Services were being reviewed to identify potential efficiency savings and opportunities for reductions in service costs;
- ii) Human Resource Initiative savings (£1 million target): the levels of allowances including car allowances were being reviewed together with overtime payments;
- iii) Budget reductions (£6 million target): services were reviewing the cost of providing services including staffing costs, non staffing costs and contract arrangements including Additional Service Provision requests with Mouchel.

Services had been requested to identify efficiency savings and budget reductions that equated to the above targets, which were consistent with the assumptions made by central Government within the Comprehensive Spending Review. The Board was advised that all services were preparing proposals for consideration for which Members and the Public would be consulted upon later in December 2009.

Services were required to consider how the Council could make the 'best use' of resources and how unit costs could be improved. Appendix B of the report submitted outlined the potential gap-surplus at different Council Tax increase levels.

During the subsequent deliberations Members sought clarification on a number of areas.

In terms of the growth areas with specific regard to Children, Families and Learning Members were keen to ascertain if other local authorities were experiencing similar trends. In response the Board was advised that the Local Authority was currently receiving a greater number of referrals than other authorities and in order to achieve a better understanding of the reasons for such a trend the University of Teesside had been commissioned to undertake some research in this regard the outcome of which would be reported to the Board.

Members referred to ongoing work by the Children's Trust Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel and to a recent presentation by the Head of Safeguarding regarding the budget pressures in Safeguarding Services and the measures that had been put in place to address the increased demand on such services. Members reiterated the importance of ensuring that appropriate intervention strategies were being pursued and measures in place to manage and alleviate the situation. It was confirmed that regular budget meetings were being held in order to closely monitor such budgets and an action plan in place to evidence the work being undertaken to relieve the budget pressure. The Board reaffirmed their request for a further update and clarification on current measures to be presented to Members.

In commenting on the current exercise in identifying efficiency savings and budget reductions the Board was advised that the reviews covered all items of expenditure across the Council. A separate exercise was being undertaken with regard to Members. Confirmation was also given that a key area for consideration included the annual contract with Mouchel.

ORDERED that the Director of Resources and Executive Member for Resources be thanked for the information provided which was noted.

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE – SECOND QUARTER 2009/2010

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive was presented which provided an overview of the Council's performance at Quarter Two 2009/2010 and identified potential issues and implications for the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

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 Two 2009/2010 under the following headings.

Local Area Agreement 2008-2011:

Of those indicators where performance could be measured against target, it was reported that 39% were on target at Quarter Two 2009/2010. The Board was advised that the main under-performing theme was '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 performing to target. It was noted however that although the increase in child protection and looked after children activity had had a marked effect upon the initial assessments indicator, recent data had demonstrated an improvement.

National Indicator Set and Local Targets:

Of those indicators where performance could be measured against target, 56% were reported to be on target at Quarter Two 2009/2010.

Planned Actions Quarter Two 2009/2010:

The Board was advised that high level of performance was evident at Quarter Two with 47 (20%) actions completed and 165 (72%) on target and 92% completed or on target in total.

The Board's attention was drawn to key performance issues at the end of Quarter Two 2009/2010 by theme.

Creating Stronger Communities:

Performance against planned actions at Quarter Two was reported as being excellent with 100% of actions being on target.

Members were advised of a notable achievement in the last quarter which included action RG10: visits to libraries which succeeded the quarter two milestone by 18,181 visits despite being 6,457

behind the first quarter milestone of 164,000. It was noted that such success was partly due to the implementation of the Libraries Action Plan with schemes to encourage community participation.

Creating Safer Communities:

It was reported that good progress had been made during Quarter Two with 20 (80%) of planned actions being completed or on target to be achieved and 60% of National Indicators on or around targeted levels.

As the referral rate for domestic violence remained high several actions had been put in place to address the issues including a new MARAC Steering Group.

Supporting Children and Young People:

Significant increases in demand in safeguarding had placed pressure on both performance and budgets. It was confirmed that a number of actions were in place and some success had been achieved in achieving efficiency savings and in improving recruitment and retention.

Early Years performance had improved with the number of children achieving a good level of achievement improving by 8% to 44% reflecting the Authority's robust action planning and implementation of quality improvement programmes. In addition Key Stage 1 performance had matched national improvement rates with good performance in reading in particular. In terms of Key Stage 2 the Authority had kept pace with national improvement.

Key areas of improvement included:-

- Although Secondary Schools standards had improved over the last three years they remained short of targets.
- Performance of national Challenge Schools was regarded as disappointing.
- Although gaps between children in vulnerable groups and their peers were better than the national average they were still a priority and the gender gap in 5 +A*-C GCSEs with English and Maths was widening.
- There had also been an increase in persistent absence levels making the 2011 target very challenging.
- Following price increases and some cost reduction measures the school meal take up (NI 52) had showed a significant decline in the number of meals served April-July 2009 against the same period for 2008 with primary schools down by 11% and secondary schools by 21%.
- The increase in child protection and looked after children activity had had a marked effect on performance against key indicators;

Promoting adult health and wellbeing, tackling exclusion and promoting equality:

Although there was continuing work it noted that greater evidence had emerged during Quarter Two on the impact of the recession on some targets notably in securing employment for people with drug and alcohol problems and people with disabilities.

It was noted that the Department of Social Care's performance in 2008/2009 had been rated as Excellent in the Care Quality Commission's annual assessment.

It was acknowledged that addressing health inequalities remained a significant challenge for the Primary Care Trust and the Council and evidence of positive outcomes from the wide range of actions and initiatives currently taking place would take some time to achieve.

Enhancing the local economy:

The Board was advised that progress against such a theme had been mixed. Actions that aimed to assist, establish and attract current and new businesses (RG25 and RG26) and create new jobs (RG27) remained on target. Work was continuing to mitigate the impact of the recession including intensive work to assist the housing market.

Securing environmental sustainability:

Such a theme continued to demonstrate strong progress overall, with high levels of achievement against key indicators and planned actions.

Although performance against waste and recycling indicators were on target at this stage it was noted that a recent fire at the EFW plant was currently impacting on both performance and cost due to diversions of waster to landfill.

Although performance in recycling and composting and street cleanliness had shown significant improvement and resident perceptions of the service had also improved it was recognised that achieving further improvements using current systems was considered to be difficult.

Fit for purpose:

Performance at Quarter Two was reported as the maximum level with 100% of actions either completed or on target.

Although Council Tax and NNDR collection rates remained on target at Quarter Two, with improvement on the same period ion 2008/2009 the arrears collection rates had fallen by 20% on last year. Further work including analysis of data was currently ongoing to improve recovery rates.

The first Comprehensive Area Assessment for Middlesbrough and the Council was now complete with no red flags identified in the Area Assessment and a score of 3 (Good) awarded for the Organisation Assessment.

Whilst performance against local indicators had improved they remained variable with 35% PIs being off target the majority of which related to diversity of the overall and top-paid workforce.

In commenting on the overall report with specific regard to concerns relating to many of the targets not being met an assurance was given in response that such areas were being addressed and action plans in place to secure improvements.

In commenting on the overall process Members agreed that the quarterly Performance reports were useful to both the Board and the individual Scrutiny Panels in developing their respective scrutiny work programmes. In order to assist such a process a suggestion was made for consideration to be given in presenting such information in a more simplified and/or graphical format.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS – IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Assistant Scrutiny Officer presented a report, which outlined progress achieved in relation to the implementation of agreed Executive actions resulting from the consideration of Scrutiny reports.

The Board was advised that of the 566 Executive actions, which should have been implemented by November 2009, 553 had been implemented, 12 partially completed and 1 had not been implemented.

Appendix B of the report gave an update in relation to the Health Scrutiny Action Plan, all of which had met the target.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That in respect of the Countryside Matters scrutiny investigation the responsible Officer be invited to attend the next meeting of the Board in order to appraise Members of the current position and progress on the implementation of the recommendation identified.

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 AND APPROVED

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

NOTED