

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 9 March 2010.

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

OFFICERS: J Bennington, C Breheny, G Brown, S Cartlidge, P Clark, A Crawford, M Harvey, J Ord, N Pocklington, N Sayer and P Stephens.

****PRESENT BY INVITATION:** The Mayor (Ray Mallon).

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dryden and Sanderson.

****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 9 February and 22 February 2010 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

MAYOR

The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting to advise on his key aims and objectives and any emerging issues of significance.

By way of introduction the Mayor gave an indication of the main areas of activity since being elected in 2002 the focus of which had initially been to more clearly identify the Council's areas of priority which had subsequently been refined to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The Raising Hope initiative set out the vision for Middlesbrough and focussed on four pillars of environment, regeneration, business community and transport underpinning the education of young people and support for vulnerable people. It was felt that this currently still remained although the overall agenda was much wider having gained a better understanding of the main issues which included social deprivation, population decline, imbalance of housing stock, lower life expectancy in certain areas in comparison with elsewhere in the region and nationally and other public health issues.

Specific reference was made to the priority redevelopment areas at Grove Hill, Gresham, Central Gardens East, Cannon Park, St Hilda's, Site 44 and other priorities involving the co-ordination of Police and Enforcement Officers, East Middlesbrough By-Pass and the finances of the Council and overall economic downturn.

Of particular concern in terms of the risk to the Council's budget related to the demand led pressures regarding safeguarding issues in Children's Families and Learning. As previously indicated significant work was being undertaken to gain a better understanding of the reasons for such pressures to enable the Council to be in a better situation to tackle the problems. The

scope of scrutiny to be involved in conjunction with the research being undertaken by the University of Teesside into the current situation was referred to.

In response to Members' questions regarding the difficulties of attracting businesses to Middlesbrough given the economic downturn the Mayor outlined the considerable efforts in promoting the benefits and opportunities which Middlesbrough presented. Following Members' comments regarding the continuing population drift the Mayor reiterated the need to address such issues given the significant financial impact on the Town. It was considered important to reflect the positive attributes of Middlesbrough and encourage people to instil pride in the Town. As previously indicated there was still an imbalance of housing stock and a need for further residential dwellings in Band B and upwards in order to attract additional and a wider range of population.

Reference was made to ongoing discussions regarding the key importance of ensuring that the communication channels and engagement were effective in getting messages across both internally and to the public at the right time. In commenting on the various ways in which the Council publicised information Members suggested that further use be made of the major road network by means of bill boards to highlight the business opportunities in Middlesbrough.

Members referred to public health issues in particular the possibility of extending the number of alcohol free zone areas and supported the work being undertaken with regard to childhood obesity and Healthy Town initiatives the improvements from which were likely to take some time to be reflected in the statistics.

ORDERED that the Mayor be thanked for the information provided and contribution to the subsequent deliberations.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – STROKE SERVICES

As part of the scrutiny process and in a report of the Executive Office Manager it was reported that the Executive had considered the findings of the Health Scrutiny Panel in its Final Report on Stroke Services.

The Executive and the Corporate Management Team had considered the Service Response and noted the response from Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust.

The Executive had supported the recommendations with the exception of Recommendation C which was amended to request Community Councils to promote Stroke awareness by methods such as newsletters that would not require the use of Community Council budgets.

NOTED

EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

NOTED

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE QUARTER THREE 2009/2010

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

Of the 77% of target indicators in relation to the Local Area Agreement where performance could be measured 46% were reported to be on target. It was confirmed that the main under-performing theme remained 'Supporting Children and Young People' where the majority of indicators relating to educational attainment, whilst in general were improving year-on-year were not performing to target. The increase in child protection and looked after children activity had continued to have a marked effect upon the majority of safeguarding indicators (NI 59 – NI 68) in

the third quarter. Under 18 year old conceptions had continued to reduce currently at double the regional average.

Many indicators within the LAA related to economic issues and it was estimated that the recession would impact negatively on around one fifth of National Indicators and the overall performance of the LAA.

In terms of progress against the National Indicator Set and local targets of those where performance could be measured against target, 55% were on target at Quarter Three.

It was confirmed that 19 actions were reported as not being on target at Quarter Three stage in respect of the planned actions in the Strategic Plan to progress the Council's contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Community Strategy themes and strategic priorities. The reasons provided for non-completion largely related to internal capacity issues and the impact of the current economic climate.

The Board was advised of key points of progress and areas for improvement in relation to performance issues at the end of Quarter Three 2009/2010 by each theme.

Under the theme of Creating Stronger Communities it was noted that although the Active People Survey had shown there had been an apparent decline in library usage local data had suggested an increase in visitor numbers and high satisfaction rates of 94%.

It was noted that whilst year-on-year improvement was likely to be achieved targets around serious violent crime, assault with injury and adult re-offending remained marginally off-target at Quarter Three.

Whilst good progress was being made with a number of targets under the theme of Supporting Children and Young People reference was made to areas for improvement including: -

- Twelve primary schools had been identified as being below floor targets for English and Maths at KS2;
- Reduction in school meal take up in secondary schools (NI 52) had continued to fall;
- Safeguarding caseload remained very high with consequential performance issues and significant budgetary pressure.

It was suggested that the Head of Achievement be invited to attend a meeting to explain the performance issues which were being investigated to improve outcomes for all children but focussing on the achievement of boys at Levels 4 and 5.

With reference to the Promoting Adult Health and Wellbeing, Tackling Exclusion and Promoting Equality theme it was reported that addressing health inequalities remained a significant challenge for the Primary Care Trust and the Council although latest figures showed significant improvement in local mortality rates.

Specific reference was made to performance in respect of the timeliness of assessments and provision of care packages which was being investigated and may require a diversion of resources from the Assessment function if no additional short term funding could be resourced.

In terms of the Enhancing the Local Economy theme it was noted that the recession was beginning to impact upon performance against target economy related NIs. The Middlehaven Partners were reviewing how Middlehaven was to be taken forward.

The Deputy Director of Safeguarding advised the Board that although a small reduction had been shown in the number of children subject of protection plans the safeguarding caseload remained very high with consequent performance issues and significant budgetary pressures.

Reference was made to an unannounced Ofsted inspection during December 2009. Although no areas for priority action had been identified the need for some areas to be developed had been recognised including the more efficient local use of the integrated Children's System, the

recording of case information and use of the Common Assessment Framework. An action plan had been compiled to address such issues and other internally identified issues.

Members referred to concerns around the current caseloads of social workers which was more than double in certain cases than the figure recommended by national guidance. Reference was also made to the use of agency staff which had resulted in higher costs. In commenting on recruitment measures it was noted that there were currently only two vacancies but there was a difficulty in recruiting experienced social workers. New social workers were not able to undertake the same range of cases as that of an experienced social worker. The loss of experienced social workers to other specialisms was a problem not only in Middlesbrough but elsewhere in the UK. Reference was made to changes within the staffing structure which would provide for better risk assessments to be undertaken.

AGREED that the Officers be thanked for the information provided which was noted.

COMMUNITY COUNCILS – FUTURE SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Head of Economic Development, Culture and Communities presented a report outlining proposals arising from recent discussions initiated by the Mayor regarding the effectiveness and operation of Community Councils.

As part of the background information details were provided of the current composition and operation of the 25 Community Councils. Information was also provided of issues arising from recent consultation with various stakeholders about the support and benefits of Community Councils and also areas for clarification to be addressed.

The Board was advised that the Community Regeneration Service had recently been restructured and Neighbourhood Management teams were now operational in specific geographical areas of highest priority and disadvantage. Local teams now had responsibility for supporting and developing the work of Community Councils in their areas and were beginning to work on a number of measures which included the following.

- i) a review of the Community Council Constitution to include a Code of Conduct and Equal Opportunities statement to ensure consistent practices, procedures and protocols.
- ii) strengthen the support and training provision for Community Council volunteer officers and development of a wider support network/good practice sharing between Community Councils.
- iii) review/reinforce Terms and Conditions of grants to ensure adherence to conduct standards, administrative requirements.
- iv) in the event of poor attendance levels consideration be given to refocusing Community Councils as to their purpose and looking at ways to make them more interesting, meaningful and appealing to a wider section of the local population.

The Board was advised of a number of other issues which were outside of the Community Regeneration Service and needed to be addressed by the Council more broadly with regard to the following: -

- a) Council involvement with Community Councils should be reinforced and structured links reintroduced between the Council and Community Councils. It was proposed in those wards where Neighbourhood Management was in place the Lead officer for each Community Council would be the local Neighbourhood Manager for the 15 Community Councils listed at Appendix 1 of the report. It was suggested that for the remaining 10 Community Councils a Lead Officer (and deputy) should be designated, drawn from various Council services.
- b) Strengthen linkage with and local decision making about Environment Department issues and to designate an Environment link officer to have access to a budget of up to £3,000 (within the overall budget) for each Community Council to be used for small-scale priorities identified in each neighbourhood.

- c) It was suggested that ward councillors chairing Community Councils ought to be an exceptional situation and where possible residents should be encouraged and supported to take on such a role.
- d) The LSP team in conjunction with the Community Regeneration Team were to consider measures to improve links between Community Councils and Clusters and to ensure that the role and function of Clusters was clear and aligned with the approach to Community Councils.
- e) The introduction of a town wide leaflet/promotional campaign to highlight the role of Community Councils and encourage greater community participation.
- f) It was considered that further discussions were needed with Erimus with a view to seeking a more consistent presence at meetings of Community Councils.
- g) The annual attendance by a Senior Director/Chief Executive was seen as helping to reinforce the importance of the Community to the local authority and provide a line of accountability at a senior level.
- h) In order to clarify the relationship between Community Councils and other resident groups it was suggested that the function of Community Councils as the main mechanism, for resident consultation should be explained and restated to partner agencies to avoid any potential confusion.
- i) In order to address concerns regarding the inconsistency in terms of feedback from Officers and other public and voluntary groups it was suggested that the responsibility of achieving a greater level of feedback could fall to the allocated local authority Lead Officer for each Community Council.
- j) The Mayor and Deputy Mayor had committed to regular meetings with Community Councils over the period of time necessary to implement the improvements outlined after which they would meet at least annually to receive feedback on general progress/issues.

ORDERED that the proposed improvements to the support provided to Community Councils as outlined be endorsed.

SUBSTANCE MISUSE EDUCATION – CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel outlined the Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of substance misuse education in Middlesbrough.

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

1. That all Council services/departments involved in delivering services to children and young people, together with all other relevant agencies, should adopt the approach endorsed by the National Treatment Agency report as highlighted in Conclusion 3 above. In order to move towards achieving this, the departments/services identified above should ensure that:
 - a) Key managers and all relevant frontline staff undergo basic drug awareness training.
 - b) A champion, or small number of champions, is/are identified to receive drug and alcohol training and become responsible for the development of systems to deliver drug and alcohol education and low level interventions.
 - c) Relevant staff are encouraged to use the resource facility provided by Platform.
 - d) Involvement in national and local drug and alcohol awareness campaigns and events is encouraged.
 - e) They make use of an up to date version of the resource pack developed for use by professionals other than schools and colleges.

2. That a process is developed to ensure regular reviews and an accountability process in relation to the number of brief interventions delivered by each local authority service/department and any other relevant organisations.
3. That in order to provide a consistent approach, schools should seek advice from the school drugs co-ordinator of Platform, on the suitability of any external agencies or individuals before they are asked or commissioned to deliver drug and/or alcohol education to young people.
4. That should (as looks likely) the teaching of PHSE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education) become a statutory provision, schools are encouraged to teach this as a separate subject (as favoured by OFSTED) and in accordance with Government advice that it should be 'an entitlement for all'. Also, those teaching PSHE should have appropriate training on drug education. Schools should also be encouraged to give the subject high importance among PSHE education.
5. That, in accordance with the identified gap in the current Treatment Plan, an evaluation is undertaken of the quality of drug education in Middlesbrough.
6. That funding is sought to continue (and if possible expand to other further education settings) the current drug education course being run for students at Middlesbrough College and St Mary's College and also to provide an academic qualification on completion of the course.
7. That, following the training of staff to deliver basic drug awareness courses at Middlesbrough College, the college is encouraged to begin delivering such courses as soon as possible.

Members supported the recommendations of the Panel but indicated that in terms of the involvement of young people in meeting such groups in order to seek their views could have been extended.

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

CANCER SCREENING SERVICES – TEES VALLEY HEALTH SCRUTINY JOINT COMMITTEE

In a report of the Scrutiny Support Officer reference was made to and a copy provided of the Final Report of the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee in respect of Cancer Screening Services across the Tees Valley.

The Final Report was due to be considered by the Primary Care Trust Boards at the end of March 2010.

The Board considered the report in the light of the implications for the people of Middlesbrough and referred to the possibility of the issues raised forming part of the future work programme for overview and scrutiny.

ORDERED that the Final Report of the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee in respect of Cancer Screening Services across the Tees Valley be referred to the Executive.

SCRUTINY REVIEW 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 – COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEISURE
SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

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

Specific reference was made to discussions by the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel in terms of the reasons for changing its current work programme and recommendation to undertake scrutiny investigations in relation to Designated Public Place Orders in respect of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 and the subject of Dangerous Dogs in view of expected legislation.

NOTED AND APPROVED

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

NOTED