

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 27 July 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Cole, Dryden, Kerr, Khan, Purvis and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, C Breheny, P Clark, A Crawford, J Ord and P Stephens.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillor Rooney.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Hobson, J Hobson, Ismail, Mawston, Sanderson and J A Walker.

**** 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 29 June 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 Senior Scrutiny 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

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Rooney, Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development to the meeting who highlighted some of the current priority areas of work.

In his opening remarks Councillor Rooney indicated that given the overall economic situation it was inevitably a difficult time for regeneration but nevertheless focused on a number of areas where the Council was and had achieved significant progress.

Reference was made to MIMA, which was not just a modern art provision but facilitated other activities not necessarily easily identifiable with particular regard to outreach work with schools, colleges and young people.

Boho One was the new commercial flagship building for the DigitalCity project. The building was environmental friendly, designed to provide space for new digital and creative companies to expand and formed an important element of the regeneration plans for Middlesbrough. It was noted that there was currently 50% occupancy of Boho allowing expansion in one of the faster growing industries.

In terms of the occupancy rates of retail premises across the Town it was noted that Middlesbrough had the same level of vacancies as many other similar areas. An indication was given of current endeavours to make vacant shops more attractive with specific reference being made to the 'we are open for business' project to encourage renewed interest in a business. Visual arts and other design groups were using premises such as those in Albert Road and Newport Road on a temporary basis.

An indication was given of progress being made with regard to homelessness with particular reference to the recent appointment of a Youth Co-ordinator to assist in further reducing and preventing youth homelessness.

Although it was acknowledged that there were difficulties, endeavours were being made to progress the redevelopment of the Grove Hill and Gresham areas. In overall terms it was noted that there was over 40% of dwellings within the private rented sector which failed to meet the decent homes standard criteria. The need to examine ways of improving such a situation and improve relations with private sector landlords was acknowledged.

In relation to new developments reference was made to the former Kwik Save site on Linthorpe Road where five shop units and 245 student accommodation units were to be built. The willingness of Teesside University to support the Town's regeneration plans was noted. Reference was also made to the proposed Community in a Cube at Middlehaven.

The focus of many of the regeneration plans centred on providing working opportunities which would assist in attracting new population to the area and for those who had been educated and trained in the area to remain within the Town. In terms of the financial constraints it was noted that further information would be known after the Government had completed its spending review expected in the Autumn 2010.

Members clarified some of the areas and specifically expressed concerns regarding a number of key performance indicators where it was shown that Middlesbrough was in the bottom quartile. Reference was made to areas such as overall unemployment and the target of reducing the gap to the North East average to 5%. Members also drew attention to performance indicators where it reflected employment skills gap. Such issues were regarded as important areas to be developed.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development referred to ongoing work with employers and Teesside University in an endeavour to address the skills shortage.

The Board was advised of current discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions on a number of schemes and reference was made to the proposals to establish a Contact Centre in Middlesbrough creating more than 500 jobs.

Members referred to a recent bid for a Local Enterprise Partnership, which aimed to explore economic opportunities across the sub-region and asked for clarification as to the position and status of Middlesbrough within such a partnership. The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that it was hoped that Middlesbrough would be closely involved working on a new economic strategy for the region.

It was recognised that one of the problems facing Middlesbrough was that a large proportion of housing development was in the inner areas of the Town. It was considered that as well as social housing there was a recognised need to provide for the middle to upper end of the market.

In response to questions regarding future development, in particular, opportunities with major employers the Board was advised of ongoing work in terms of identifying the reasons why such organisations had not established or expanded in the area. Specific reference was made to the feasibility of pursuing opportunities with Durham and Tees Valley Airport in terms of expanding areas such as freight as part of overall discussions with neighbouring authorities to tackle the economic difficulties. Many of the initiatives being pursued were linked with the bid for City status with the aim of Middlesbrough playing a pivotal role as a commercial and administrative centre. It was hoped that the profile of Middlesbrough would be raised which would assist in attracting further investment. Given the overall economic climate and number of joint initiatives across the Tees, Members indicated that there might be sufficient flexibility and possible readjustment within the scrutiny work programme to undertake some additional joint scrutiny work.

The Board acknowledged the areas highlighted and looked forward to progress being made to be reported at the next round of meetings with Executive Members.

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

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – BLUE BADGE PARKING SCHEME – ENERGY REDUCTION – UNIVERSITY RESIDENTS PARKING SCHEME

As part of the scrutiny process and in a report of the Executive Office Manager it was reported that the Executive had considered the following reports: -

- a) Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel's investigation into the Blue Badge Parking Scheme;
- b) Environment Scrutiny Panel's investigation into Energy Reduction;
- c) Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel's investigation into University Residents Parking Scheme.

The Executive and the Corporate Management Team had considered and supported the Service Responses and noted the formal response received from the Primary Care Trust in respect of recommendation 4 of the Final Report on the Blue Badge Parking Scheme.

Members referred to the response from NHS Middlesbrough in respect of the Blue Badge Parking Scheme. In view of the changes as a result of the recent Department of Health's White Paper it was suggested that the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel re-examine that particular aspect of the report.

AGREED as follows: -

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That the Contract Manager, Primary Care Procurement & Contract Management, NHS Middlesbrough be invited to attend a meeting of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel to give an update on the way in which medical assessments for blue badge applicants were commissioned.

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE 2009/2010

The Corporate Performance Team Leader presented a report of the Assistant Chief Executive, which provided an overview of the Council's performance during 2009/2010.

In terms of the progress against Middlesbrough's Local Area Agreement 2008-2011, it was reported that of those indicators where performance could be measured against target, 54% were on target at the end of 2009/2010. The Board acknowledged that this was an area for improvement even taking into account the current economic recession.

The Board noted 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 they were not performing to target.

It was recognised that many indicators within the LAA related to economic issues and the recession had had a negative impact with over 60% of indicators not achieving the target.

It was noted that Creating Safer Communities theme had performed well with serious acquisitive crime and assault with injury crime rates continuing to reduce and re-offending rates had met targets.

The Board was advised that in terms of the Council's performance against all performance indicators, the position was more positive. It was confirmed that of those indicators where performance could be measured against target, 57% were reported to be on target at the end of 2009/2010.

Reference was made to the 2009/2010 Strategic Plan, in which the Council had identified 225 actions to progress its contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Community Strategy themes and strategic priorities. It was reported that a high level of performance had been achieved during 2009/2010 with 204 (91%) actions completed.

The report outlined the key performance issues at the end of 2009/2010 by theme.

It was noted that there were many changes and a clearer picture would be given as part of the Council Performance, Quarters 1 and 2, 2010/2011 report to be considered by the Board.

Whilst the Board acknowledged that the Council was performing well in certain areas there were significant concerns around areas such as safeguarding and attainment under the Supporting Children and Young People theme.

Reference was also made to the scope for expansion in respect of the Boho One premises which were currently around 50% occupied and the impact of a fire at the EFW plant which had impacted on the performance and costs related on the targets in respect of recycling and waste landfill.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REVIEW – RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTED

The Scrutiny Support 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 627 Executive actions, which should have been implemented by June 2010, 623 had been implemented and 4 partially completed. Since the circulation of the report an update had been received and confirmation given of further completed actions.

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

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

OLDER HOUSING AREAS – FINAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Economic of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel outlined the Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its scrutiny review of Older Housing Areas.

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

- a) That all the mechanisms the Council has available at its disposal be used to deliver housing on the strategic housing sites, as outlined in the Core Strategy of the LDF, including for example the provision of service infrastructure, the use of a Local Asset Backed Delivery Vehicle and the preparation of development briefs, as well as increased partnership working with the HCA, the private sector and Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) in order to deliver new housing within town.
- b) That an early review of the Core Strategy and Regeneration Development Plan Document be undertaken, as although theoretically the supply of land in Middlesbrough is sufficient to meet the RSS housing requirement, this was based on market conditions prior to the economic downturn. In the current conditions build rates have been slower than previous forecasts and sites identified for housing development are not coming forward. Middlesbrough is failing to meet the annual targets and even the revised targets will prove challenging. Urgent action is therefore needed to identify new sites that will enable additional housing to be provided within the town in the next five years.

- c) That efforts continue in partnership with the other Tees Valley authorities to promote the need for government investment in Housing Market Renewal (HMR) activities within the Tees Valley and to ensure that the Tees Valley secures the level of funding that is needed to deliver transformational change within some of the most deprived areas of the country.
- d) That a clearer vision for the older housing areas be communicated to enable people within the town to understand the current position and the work that is being undertaken on the various sites to provide a new housing offer and regenerate communities. Within this communication clarity needs to be provided in respect of a realistic timescale or aim date for completion of the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme and creation of new sustainable communities in Gresham, Grove Hill and Middlehaven / St Hilda's.
- e) That a focus is maintained on increasing the town's housing offer at the middle and upper end of the market in order to increase the number of Council Tax Band C, D, E and F properties within the town, with a view to rebalancing the housing market and increasing the town's population.
- f) It is clear that the selective licensing is working but consideration needs to be given to an exit strategy, as the current designation is due to end in June 2012. The potential increase in the number of properties to be licensed, as a direct result of the proposed revisions to the Gresham Regeneration Project also requires further consideration.
- g) That a joint Officer / Member group consisting of Housing Officers and a number of interested Members be established to develop a discussion document that would explore the potential for measures to be put in place to ensure that the new build properties constructed in Gresham are purchased by owner occupiers and not private sector landlords.
- h) That the Mayor provides bi-annual updates to the Panel in order to advise on the progress being made in respect of the Gresham project.
- i) That a Private Rented Housing Strategy be developed and work be undertaken to increase the Council's knowledge of the PRS in an effort to improve relations with private sector landlords and that as part of that process the Private Rented Housing Strategy be referred to the Panel for consideration.
- j) That the option to provide financial assistance through the Regional Loans Scheme to private sector landlords to improve conditions in the PRS be adopted.
- k) That as part of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme the following elements be included to encourage responsible landlords to join; access to the private registration scheme, access to financial assistance through the regional loans scheme, access to a landlord hotline number for tenancy advice, discounted services and reduced advertising fees where possible.
- l) That a review of the current licence fee charged to landlords of HMO's be undertaken.
- m) That the possibility of developing a 'local letting agency' with the potential to fast track and match Housing Benefit recipients with private rented sector properties be explored and some concrete proposals put forward.
- n) That where facelift works are undertaken and grants awarded that a grant condition be built in to ensure that standards are maintained for a minimum period of five years.

- o) That a joint piece of work be undertaken with the PCT to examine the benefits of the work undertaken in Liverpool in respect of using the Health Housing Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to improve housing conditions in the PRS as well as reduce health inequalities. The purpose of the work is to explore how a similar 'Healthy Homes' initiative could be launched in Middlesbrough and to develop further the joint work undertaken with the PCT in respect of the housing/health agenda. Use is to be made of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) toolkit as part of this work, with a view to the information gained being used as part of the business case in the submission of a bid to the PCT to secure the necessary funding.
- p) That information be made available to private sector tenants to advise them of their rights in respect of housing conditions. Information on the type of action that the Council can take to address any issues raised also needs to be highlighted.

Members sought clarification on a number of areas and specifically referred to recommendation (n) of the report relating to the suggestion that as part of the grant conditions in respect of facelift works a minimum period of five years be built in to ensure that standards are maintained. It was suggested that recommendation (n) include a reference to the establishment of an inspection regime.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive subject to recommendation (n) of the report including a reference to the establishment of an inspection regime.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS – RESPITE PROVISION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

It was confirmed that no requests for scrutiny reviews had been received from the Executive, Non- 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 an Executive Member to consider undertaking an investigation into Respite Provision for Young Adults Aged 18-25 as follows: 'A member of the public has expressed concerns in respect of the recent events surrounding Levick House and the poor quality of respite provision for young people aged 18 and over. Undertaking a scrutiny review into this topic would assist in establishing the needs of young adults and the implications for parents/carers.'

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 into the suggested topic for review by the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel.

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS – VEHICLE EMISSIONS – AIR QUALITY

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

Reference was made to the last meeting of the Board held on 29 June 2010 when the Scrutiny Work Programme had been considered including a suggestion for the topic on vehicle emissions/air quality to be undertaken by the Environment Scrutiny Panel in conjunction with the Health Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED as follows: -

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That a Working Group be established comprising the Chair and Vice–Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Panel and the Health Scrutiny Panel together with one other (non-labour) Member from each Panel to undertake the scrutiny investigation in respect of vehicle emissions/air quality.

CALL IN REQUESTS

The Chair confirmed that two Call Ins had been received and meetings arranged as follows: -

- a) Wednesday 28 July 2010 at 2.00 p.m. in respect of Crèche Provision at Council venues;
- b) Monday 2 August 2010 at 10.00 a.m. in respect of Site 44 (Longridge), Coulby Newham.

NOTED