

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 24 August 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Dryden, C Hobson, J Hobson, Ismail, Kerr, Khan, Purvis and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, C Breheny, P Clark, A Crawford, J Lewis, J Ord and N Sayer.

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

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, 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 27 July 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 CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING

The Chair welcomed Councillor Carr, Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning to the meeting who highlighted some of the current priority areas of work, which included the following: -

- a) in terms of safeguarding issues it was noted that there were currently 350 children looked after and the number of children on protection orders had decreased to 300 from approximately 330 six months ago;
- b) it was acknowledged that there were significant budget pressures in this regard the largest area of financial pressure related to children in residential accommodation;
- c) reference was made to work undertaken in conjunction with the Director of Strategic Resources examining various ways of reducing such pressures including the re-negotiation of the contract with independent providers;
- d) the Board was advised of good GCSE results which had just been received which demonstrated that 43% of students had achieved five or more GCSEs at A – C including English and Maths, an increase from 36.4 % further information on which and a detailed breakdown could be given in November 2010;
- e) all secondary schools in the Local Authority had shown significant improvement in results;
- f) Members were advised of improved Key Stage 2 results which narrowed the gap in comparison with the national and regional averages;

- g) reference was made to initial considerations which had been given as to how schools might be organised in the context of the new Government's intentions to increase the number of academies;
- h) although Middlesbrough was relatively small in proportion to others it had already had more academies than others in the area;
- i) it was noted that a number of schools were considering applying for academy status one of the benefits of which was regarded as all schools would be on an equal playing field in terms of accessing resources.

In response to comments regarding exclusions and high number of children in complementary education the Executive Member gave an indication of the protocols already in place, which were working well and showed a high rate of success when children moved school and to other opportunities which were being examined.

In commenting on the implications of additional schools applying for academy status Members sought clarification as to the implications on the Children, Families and Learning Department which had already been the subject of much change in recent years. The Executive Member indicated that there would be a need to examine the structure of the Department but referred to the significant expertise within the Department, which the schools would need to access. Reference was also made to the other work such as the 40 primary schools, specialist school needs and work in relation to attainment. Whilst the emphasis on the establishment of academies was a Government direction the Local Authority had a clear role as part of wider partnership arrangements and providing support and advice.

Members also enquired of any likely impact on the current specialist school programme and any influence of such a process on the future employment in the area. In response, the Executive Member referred to current arrangements whereby Academies worked closely with other schools and the Local Authority. Specific reference was made to the Unity City Academy situated in an area with high levels of deprivation. The Unity City Academy was working closely with other agencies including the Local Authority. Access to a specialist school programme had been jointly discussed and the Local Authority was working closely with Middlesbrough College and Teesside University as part of the partnership arrangements.

Members commented on the pressures of the overall budget situation with specific reference to the reduction in Department of Education Area Based Grant and the need to cope with any further cuts that may result in October 2010 after the Government announces its spending review which would set the funding levels for Councils for the next three years.

In response to concerns raised in relation to those areas where the Authority was shown to be in the bottom quartile of certain performance indicators the Executive Member gave an assurance that a range of actions was being pursued in an endeavour to improve such a situation. Specific reference was made to Safeguarding issues in particular measures to increase the opportunities for using in-house fostering and reduce the need to employ agency staff. In terms of the number of children looked after it was pointed out that the figures in respect of Middlesbrough had always been higher than the national average but it was noted that the number of children subject to protection orders, which had previously been significantly high, had recently decreased. The Executive Member also referred to the impending outcome of research undertaken by Teesside University in this regard, which would be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

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

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK –COMMUNITY JUSTICE COURTS

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 Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel's Final report on Community Justice Courts.

The Executive and the Corporate Management Team had considered and supported the Service Responses.

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

CALL IN – OUTCOME – ENVIRONMENT CRÈCHE REVIEW – SITE 44 LONGRIDGE

In a report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer reference was made to the outcome of the meetings of the Board held on 28 July and 2 August 2010 in accordance with the Authority's Call-In procedure.

The report set out the following observations of the Board as follows: -

Crèche Provision – meeting of the Board held on 28 July 2010: -

'That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recognises that the Executive decision to close the crèche provisions in Middlesbrough was not an easy decision to take. However, with budget pressures facing the Council, the potential savings and the provision of alternative facilities meant the decision needed to be taken.'

Site 44 Longridge, meeting of the Board held on 2 August 2010: -

'That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recognises that the decision of the Executive Sub Committee for Property was in accord with the decision taken years previously to dispose of the land. The approval to release to a selected bidder would secure a capital receipt, which will assist the Councils Capital programme.'

In both cases the Board had agreed that the decisions made should be not referred back for reconsideration.

Councillor C Hobson, the originator of the request to Call-In the decision made in relation to Site 44, Longridge read out the two options outlined in the report considered by the Executive Sub-Committee for Property at its meeting held on 12 July 2010 as follows: -

'Option 1 – dispose of the site based on the highest score whilst also ensuring best consideration in sale, commensurate with delivering the Council's two objectives from the sale: an active housing building programme and generating a capital receipt.

Option 2 – do not sell but this decision would have to be justified in the context of non delivery of the Council's regeneration aims in relation to Housing and should only be considered if the bid does not give best consideration in terms of value and planning quality.'

In response to a comment which had been made at the meeting of the Board held on 2 August to consider the Call-In the Senior Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Call-In request and the subsequent meeting to consider it were both in accordance with the agreed Call-In procedures.

NOTED

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 – VEHICLE EMISSIONS – AIR QUALITY – HEALTH SEMINAR ON WHITE PAPER

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

Reference was made to the 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.

To undertake such work the meeting of the Board held on 27 July 2010 agreed to the establishment of a Joint Working Party comprising the Chair and Vice-Chair of both the Environment Scrutiny Panel and the Health Scrutiny Panel plus one non-Labour Member from each of the respective Panels.

Members were reminded that the Health Scrutiny Panel was hosting a seminar covering the White Paper on 10 September 2010 to which all Members had been invited to attend.

AGREED as follows: -

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That Councillors C Hobson and Mrs H Pearson be appointed to the Joint Working Party to examine the impact of vehicle emissions on health.

IMPROVING THE LEVEL OF EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – FINAL REPORT UPDATE OF THE SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel outlined the information received by the Panel regarding its recent review of the previous investigation into improving the Levels of Employment for People with Disabilities.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the information received: -

- i. That efforts be made to identify the necessary funding to continue the FORWARDS service at its current capacity.
- ii. That the initiatives commissioned as joint pieces of work with the PCT, namely the 'Better Off in Work' calculations be flagged up with the PCT, Local Medical Committee and influential GP's within commissioning circles and it be emphasised that the Council is keen for this joint arrangement to continue in the future.
- iii. That consideration be given to where alternative funding for the Council's contribution to the 'Better Off in Work' calculations can be secured in order to ensure that this service can continue to be provided to people with disabilities post 2011.
- iv. That the Executive /Chief Executive write a letter to Mouchel highlighting the benefits of the guaranteed interview scheme for people with disabilities and requesting that Mouchel give consideration to introducing the scheme into their recruitment policy.
- v. That the Council seeks to promote the benefits of the guaranteed interview scheme to its key contractors and those organisations that receive grants from the Council.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

NOTED

ANY OTHER BUSINESS - NEXT MEETING

The Chair reminded Members that the next meeting of the Board would be held on Thursday 2 September 2010 at 2.00 p.m.

NOTED