

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 18 October 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Dryden, Kerr, Mawston, McIntyre, Sanderson, J A Walker and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, S Blood, A Crawford and P Slocombe.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor Thompson, Executive Member for Public Health and Sport.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, C Hobson, P Purvis and Saunders.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20 September 2011 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 AND APPROVED

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SPORT

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Public Health and Sport to the meeting who focussed on a number of key areas of the portfolio at a time when the Council faced many challenges in coping with significant budget reductions.

The Executive Member welcomed the NHS reforms in terms of local authorities gaining public health responsibilities and also referred to the progress which had been made in setting up a Shadow Health and Well-Being Board. The diverse membership of the Board which included local NHS representatives/health professionals and chaired by the Council's Chief Executive was considered beneficial in progressing joint working arrangements. In response to clarification sought by Members in terms of the role of the Health and Well-Being Board the Executive Member gave an indication of the Board's strategic role and the detailed work which would be undertaken by proposed work streams and/or task and finish groups. Members also referred to the work of the Clinical Commissioning Groups in terms of regional commissioning in order to maintain and improve current joint services.

The Board's attention was drawn to some of the Council's Health Improvement Initiatives such as the smoking cessation programmes and although there was evidence of some improvement it was acknowledged that smoke related health issues remained a significant problem as did alcohol associated problems. Reference was made to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which was currently being re-examined which gave an in depth look into health and social care services to ensure better outcomes and meet the needs of local people.

Specific reference was made to the successful two years Healthy Towns Programme in terms of raising awareness which had ceased in March 2011. It was hoped that certain projects would continue and receive mainstream funding.

An indication was given of some of the current budget proposals which were subject to consultation in respect of sport and leisure facilities. Whilst inevitably there were challenges the Executive Member also indicated that there were opportunities such as the proposals for a Sports Village at Prissick base.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Public Health and Sport be thanked for the information provided.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – TAXI FACILITIES CROSSFELL ROAD – JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL – MAJOR TRAUMA CENTRE

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 two Final Reports in respect of Taxi Facilities in Crossfell Road and the designation of James Cook University Hospital as a Major Trauma Centre.

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

Members stressed the importance of James Cook University Hospital being designated as a Major Trauma Centre and the need for associated services to be maintained to ensure the continuation of such a designation. Given such difficult financial constraints there was a concern that this would impact on local services and result in services being centralised elsewhere in the region.

NOTED

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Director of Strategic Resources presented a report, which outlined the medium term financial position for 2012/2013 to 2014/2015 and set out the estimated draft 2012/2013 revenue budget.

The report had been based on a number of factors including: the 2010/2011 Final Outturn which included £416,000 net savings against the General Fund and £5.9 million efficiency savings; the 2011/2012 revenue budget of £136.508 million; a Council tax increase of 2.5%; identified structural budget issues addressed; and local government finance settlements. In 2010/2011 Middlesbrough had received a reduction in central government support of £15.2 million and an additional reduction of £6.6 million had been outlined for 2012/2013.

The 2012/2013 projected draft revenue budget of £146.559 million was outlined at Appendix A and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/2013 – 2014/2015 at Appendix B of the report submitted. A budget deficit of £13.8 million (at a 2% Council tax increase) was projected for 2012/2013.

The Board's attention was drawn to the main variances from the current year's budget summarised by Community Strategy priority.

It was noted that the current medium term assumptions were continually been reconsidered. Pay awards had been provided for at a £250 increase for employees earning £21,000 or less and running costs and other inflation had been provided at a current Consumer Price Index of 3.2%. An additional inflationary provision had been made for the assessed impact of increased prices for energy and fuel of £0.2 million.

The report set out the principles adopted in preparing the 2012/2013 projected revenue budget and Medium Term Financial Plan and consultation process to be implemented.

The Board was advised that the levels of reductions needed were significantly higher than those recently required. It was noted that whilst all general overhead expenditure would be subject to challenge, the level of reductions could not be met without impact on services.

Members were informed that 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. In their initial comments Members expressed disappointment at not receiving an opportunity to consider and submit comments on the report prior to consideration by the Executive.

The Board's attention was drawn to significant pressures relating to the Supporting Children and Young People Community Strategy theme around safeguarding which would be reviewed following the 2nd Quarter's budget update. It was also noted that there were significant pressures within the promoting Adult Health and Well-Being, Tackling Exclusion and Promoting Social Care theme. A provision of £750,000 had been made to deal with ongoing unavoidable demand led spending pressures in 2011/2012.

Reference was made to current NHS reforms specifically Health and Well-Being Boards, other health organisations and responsibilities of South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust around community services. Members indicated that further clarification was required regarding current discussions in relation to the scope for joint working and financial arrangements.

It was confirmed that further provision had been made in respect of the Council's Capital programme (£1 million additional borrowing) which included additional provision to help advance the Council's Housing Strategy.

Members stressed the importance of getting the right message across to members of the public at such a difficult financial time and the need to demonstrate the benefits of some of the efficiency savings which had been achieved.

In discussing the budget deficit of £13.8 million for which there were currently £10 million proposals an assurance was given that arrangements would be made for all Members to be consulted appropriately.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted and the budget strategy as outlined be approved.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS – AFFORDABLE HOUSING – ERIMUS HOUSING – REMOVAL OF ASBESTOS

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

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report, which outlined a request from a member of the public to consider undertaking an investigation into the Council's adopted affordable housing strategy. The reasons for the request were reported as follows:-

'A member of the public has expressed concerns as they have noticed three planning applications, two of which were major (290 and above homes) have been agreed with developers and two more which were in the process of being set out.

The concern is that it appears the Council is not adhering to its own adopted strategy.'

The report also outlined a request from the Audit and Governance Committee for a scrutiny investigation to be undertaken into the arrangements with Erimus Housing concerning the

removal of asbestos. The reasons for the request centred around 'a clause in the Housing stock transfer document which stated the responsibilities of Erimus Housing and the Council in respect of Asbestos.

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

ORDERED that further information be provided in respect of both topics to be considered at a special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS

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

NOTED

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

NOTED