

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 15 November 2011.

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

OFFICERS: B Baldam, J Bennington, S Blood, P Clark, A Crawford, J Ord, N Pocklington, J Shiel and P Stephens.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor N J Walker, Executive Member for Streetscene Services and Transport.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mawston and Saunders.

** DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

| Name of Member | Type of Interest | Item / Nature of Interest |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Councillor J A Walker | Personal/Non-Prejudicial | Agenda Item 5: Feedback from Executive-Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel Progress Report in so far as it related to the Medical Practice – registered at GP Practice. |

** COUNCILLOR SANDERSON

Councillor Sanderson thanked all concerned for their kind thoughts and good wishes during his recent period of ill health.

** MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 18 October 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 STREETSCENE SERVICES AND TRANSPORT

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Streetscene Services and Transport to the meeting who in her initial remarks listed the areas and functions included within the portfolio.

The Executive Member indicated that the overall objective was to maintain current standards and to continue to strive for improvements where possible in a difficult time of severe financial constraints.

The Board's attention was drawn to a number of significant areas of work over recent months.

Reference was made to the many events held in relation to the Transporter Bridge Centenary for which the Council had been successful in obtaining £2.6 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

It was noted that there had been much media interest in the launch of the Council's Pothole Hotline Initiative utilising external funds to repair damage to roads caused by the recent severe winters. In terms of the programme of resurfacing roads and footpaths reference was made to a proposed increase in such works over the remaining financial year.

Confirmation was given that the Council's car parking charges were currently being examined and that in order to attract potential customers over the Christmas shopping period short stay parking charges had been reduced at Zetland and Station Street car parks for up to two hours from £1.70 to £1.

The Executive Member acknowledged that inevitably there were a number of challenges arising from the scale of financial savings which had to be achieved. Reference was made to a number of the proposed budget proposals which included the ceasing of funding for the Shopmobility service, ceasing the subsidised bus services, reducing the number of Street Wardens, introduction of a charge for Residents Parking Permits, increase of allotment charges, introduction charge for all junk jobs, reduction in the Environmental Education Service, reduced budgets for streetscene, countryside management, street lighting and highways, closure of Council depots at Lloyd Street and at Prissick and that all service units from Lloyd Street, Prissick and Steward Park be relocated to Cargo Fleet Lane depot. An indication was given of some of the issues arising from the public and other forum meetings in relation to the budget proposals. Specific reference was made to reported problems of access with regard to mobility scooters/wheelchairs in certain areas where chicanes/barriers had been provided which was currently being investigated and a Working Group recently set up to consider the matter.

In response to Members' comments an assurance was given that there were no proposals to reduce the budget in relation to Winter Maintenance and that there were appropriate contingency budget arrangements in place should it be required.

Following Members' questions confirmation was given that the dimming of street lights when appropriate was one of a number of energy saving measures which were currently being examined. The topic had been investigated by the Environment Scrutiny Panel and it was suggested that an update be provided for Members.

Members commented on the Council's green waste policy with regard to changes to the collection period and a specific problem described regarding the container currently provided at Nature's World. The Executive Member confirmed that the issue with regard to the container at Nature's World would be examined and Members advised accordingly. The Board was also advised of environmental reasons not just financial for green waste not being collected in November given the low tonnage of material collected.

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

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – ACKLAM HALL

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 a Final Report of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel in respect of Acklam Hall.

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

Members indicated that a planning application had now been submitted.

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

SECOND QUARTER – REVENUE BUDGET PROJECTED OUTTURN

A report of the Director of Strategic Resources was presented which provided an estimate of the annual projected outturn for 2011/2012 based on the second quarter review of revenue expenditure against the current year's Revenue Budget. In overall terms the projected outturn reflected a large pressure on financial resources and included significant pressures within services as outlined in the report.

The projected outturn position for 2011/2012 was reported as a net budget pressure of (+£1,391,000) which represented a 1.01% pressure against the £136.508 million 2011/2012 budget. The Council had embedded within its budget monitoring procedure reporting on efficiency savings. The Board was advised that the Council and the partnership with Mouchel were projected to under achieve the efficiency savings targets by (+£907,000) as outlined in the report.

The Board's attention was drawn to a number of key budget pressure areas and Members sought clarification on the action being taken to address such pressures which included the following:-

Children, Families and Learning:

- (a) The Independent Fostering Agencies budget projected pressure of + £613,000.
- (b) A pressure of + £1,591,000 projected on the Children's Agency residential Schools budget which was subject to change as it was a demand led service.
- (c) Placements had been reviewed as part of the recent Ofsted Inspection and had been regarded as appropriate and essential given the needs of the children. Measures were being pursued for greater co-ordination and integration of early intervention and prevention services which was needed to reduce future placement levels.
- (d) The Management Support section was projecting a net pressure of +£118,000 on legal fees due to the high level of demand currently being experienced.

Social Care:

- (a) The additional costs of increases on demand led budgets in quarters 3 to 4 had been estimated as £385,000 giving rise to an overall pressure of +£830,000.
- (b) Based on payments made to date it was anticipated that there would be a pressure on the Supporting People budget of + £216,000. All the contracts that were currently in place were being reviewed with the aim of reducing costs and bringing the budget into balance.
- (c) Although the economic downturn continued to affect sales at the workshop of Ayresome Industries the Board was pleased that improvements had been made and there were other potential contracts to be gained.

Environment:

- (a) Reference was made to an income shortfall of +£116,000 which was forecast due to the efficiency targets for charging for replacement wheeled bins and charges for non-domestic waste being only partially achieved.
- (b) Details were provided of the main projected pressure of + £488,000 on Parking Solutions which was likely to continue.

Regeneration:

- (a) Reference was made to an anticipated income shortfall on the Building Control Service budget of +£82,000 partly due to a decrease in the number of major fee receipt works and legislative changes in respect of fee charging. It was confirmed that the service was currently being reviewed.
- (b) It was noted that a review was also being undertaken of the Architect's Service where the fee income was expected to be +£255,000 less than the budgeted target.

Corporate Services:

- (a) Reference was made to a pressure of + £111,000 which was forecast owing to a shortfall of rental income for the Enterprise Centres although attempts were continuing to stimulate demand.

The Board noted the ongoing work being undertaken by Service Areas to mitigate the anticipated budget areas which would impact on next year but expressed concerns about dealing with the current year's budget pressures. In commenting on the budget pressures with particular regard to Social Care reference was made to the outcome of a recent Court case in relation to decisions taken by the Isle of Wight Council in terms of reducing its adult social care budget. It was suggested that further information be provided in this regard.

The Deputy Director of Safeguarding presented a report on measures that had already been or were being introduced to manage the number of children within the 'Looked After' system. Middlesbrough continued to have unprecedented numbers (350-400) of looked after children the vast majority of whom were the subject of Court Orders or involved in care proceedings. Middlesbrough's figures mirrored those of other local authorities with similar levels of deprivation such as South Tyneside, Liverpool, Salford and Manchester. The majority of such authorities including Middlesbrough had seen more than a 50% increase in the number of high multiple problem families.

The report outlined progress and options for establishing additional local residential provision for children with disabilities, specialist needs and emotional and behavioural problems. A key feature of the current overspending on placement costs for Looked After Children related to such children and residential care. It was confirmed that other Tees Valley local authorities were experiencing similar difficulties and an indication was given of a range of Middlesbrough and Tees Valley wide options which were being pursued. All Tees Valley authorities had committed to a shared exercise to identify priorities and options for establishing local residential provision.

Whilst recruitment had been achieved for in-house foster carers Members acknowledged that this had to be balanced against the number of foster carers which were retiring. Other strategies included the appointment of a Placement Officer to ensure that contract management was robust and strengthened.

The current significant caseloads of social workers was acknowledged and the need to pursue the various strategies for early intervention. Specific reference was made to the role of the Family Intervention Team to assist on identifying whether families had the capacity to change following a period of assessment.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the Officers be thanked for the detailed information provided which was noted.
2. That the Assistant Director: Business Development and Commissioning be invited to attend the meeting of the Board to be held on 13 December 2011 and that further information be provided on the implications of the legal case referred to in respect of the Isle of Wight Council with regard to any proposals which Middlesbrough Council intended to pursue.

SECOND QUARTER – CAPITAL MONITORING AND REVIEW 2011/2012

A report of the Director of Strategic Resources was presented which provided an update on the Council's capital programme (2008/2009 to 2012/2013) based on the second quarter review of capital expenditure.

It was reported that the change in overall net expenditure across all schemes since the last review had resulted in a decrease of £35,000 in Council wide resources to support the capital programme (0.01% of the total programme) as outlined in Appendix A.

Specific reference was made to significant variations to the programme relating to the Harnessing Technology (ICT) Grant of £118,000 and Housing (Regeneration) of £17,656,000 with particular regard to a decision awaited on a bid to the Government's Housing Market Renewal Transition Fund to complete the site assembly in St. Hilda's and Phase 1 of Gresham.

Appendix B of the report submitted showed the re-profiled gross expenditure and resources since the last review and Appendix C the detailed allocation of block budgets held by service areas in respect of individual schemes.

Gross expenditure had increased from £326.176 million to £344.130 million and the level of under-programming at Quarter 2 had currently been estimated at £5.082 million (1.48%). The overall programme position as at Quarter 2 review was shown as Appendix F of the report.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted.

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE – SECOND QUARTER 2011/2012

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive was presented which provided an overview of the Council's performance at Quarter Two 2011/2012.

The report outlined the Council's performance against the 2011/2012 Strategic Plan at the end of Quarter 2 and summarised progress at the end of September 2011 by Department and Service against the Council's corporate performance measures and improvement actions.

The Council's floor target for achievement of improvement actions was stated as 85% and performance at the end of Quarter Two was reported as 84% of actions achieved or on target. It was noted that only ten actions had been reported as off target.

The Board considered the key performance issues at the end of Quarter Two as discussed at recent budget and performance clinics.

Specific reference was made to Children, Families and Learning with particular regard to attainment results and a continued rise in the numbers of Looked After Children.

As previously indicated the large cohort of Looked After Children with many multiple and complex issues was unlikely to reduce significantly in the short term and the high number of children in long-term Independent Fostering Agency placements was particularly significant in terms of the service's ability to reduce costs. The report outlined a number of structural and process changes and early intervention and prevention initiatives to help mitigate potential growth in numbers.

In general terms the provisional attainment results released in Quarter Two in respect of KS1, KS2 and KS4 were considered to be disappointing. In particular, achievement at both KS2 Level 4 in English and Maths and 5+ A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths had failed to meet targets and were significantly lower than last year's results. It was noted however, the majority of improvement actions for achievement were on target and all schools identified by the DfE had appropriate action plans in place in line with the School Improvement Strategy.

The Board was keen to examine further the concerns in relation to the current and future impact of reported decreases in the levels of attainment.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That a further report be submitted regarding the levels of attainment in Middlesbrough Schools and the Deputy Director: Achievement be invited to attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to be held on 13 December 2011.

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

CALL IN REQUESTS

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

NOTED