

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 17 September 2013.

PRESENT: Councillors Brunton (Chair), Arundale, Kerr, P Purvis, Sanderson and P Sharrocks

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillor N J Walker, Executive Member for Environment
Councillor Harvey, Assistant Executive Member.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, A Crawford, L Henman, E Pout, N Sayer, P Slocombe and P Stephens.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, Dryden, C Hobson, McIntyre, J A Walker and Williams..

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

13/41 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 20 AUGUST 2013

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20 August 2013 were submitted.

In response to clarification sought from Members it was confirmed that further information had been requested regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel in respect of Paperless Committee meetings.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20 August 2013 be approved as a correct record.
2. That Officers be invited to attend the meeting of the Board to be held on 15 October 2013 in order to provide an update and further clarification regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel with regard to Paperless Committee meetings.

13/42 ATTENDANCE OF EXECUTIVE MEMBERS - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

By way of introduction the Senior Scrutiny Officer submitted a report which included a schedule detailing proposed attendance by individual Members of the Executive to meetings of the Board. It was intended for Executive Members to provide updates on their respective work in terms of their aims, aspirations, objectives, priorities and any emerging issues especially having regard to the current financial pressures and ways of mitigating such circumstances. The process was part of the scrutiny arrangements of holding the Executive and Executive Members to account and also provided the opportunity for the Board to identify or highlight any issues of concern or difficulty.

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Environment who indicated that the portfolio covered a wide range of issues including recent additional responsibilities of leisure, sport, parks, bereavement services and Middlesbrough Registration Service. Reference was also made to the appointment in May 2013 of Councillor Harvey as Assistant Executive Member who was focussing on a number of projects including the implementation of the revised refuse and recycling arrangements.

The importance of raising awareness of the need for change and highlighting the positive work which had been achieved with diminishing financial resources was emphasised. Specific reference was made to making best use of the resources available but at the same time recognising the operational priorities which included the need to maintain high standards with regard to cemeteries and street cleanliness in the Town Centre.

The Board was advised of progress with regard to a number of areas which included:-

- revised refuse and recycling collection rounds information on which had been provided at such venues as Community Council meetings and specific roadshows,
- introduction of 20 mph speed limits across the Town;
- dealing with pot holes;
- the possibility of introducing self-management with regard to allotments;
- work of the Bereavement Services Forum and the current examination into the possibility of broadcasting services and provision of DVD facilities for services;
- engagement with various forums for Friends Groups;
- condition and treating of bowling greens at Pallister Park;
- Prissick sports facility;
- new rail halt at James Cook University Hospital.

Specific reference was made to The Change Programme and the need to consider alternative ways of delivering services in the future including an assessment of services which may no longer be possible for the Authority to provide.

In response to clarification sought from Members regarding the ingress of water into repaired pot holes the Executive Member advised the Board of current funding arrangements and method of dealing with pot holes.

In commenting on the provision of portable flashing 20 mph signs a Member referred to the need for additional measures to reinforce the 20 mph limit on Lodore Grove given the extent of traffic and number of school children. The Executive Member confirmed the availability of additional signs which were being moved around the Town and suggested that a request be submitted by means of the One Stop Shop.

The Board was keen to see an increase in the levels of recycling especially after the introduction of revised refuse and recycling arrangements. The Executive Member confirmed that early indications had shown a significant increase in the number of households recycling.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Environment be thanked for the information provided.

13/43

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL POSITION 2014/2015 TO 2016/2017

The Director of Strategic Resources presented a report on the projected Medium Term Financial position for 2014/2015 to 2016/2017 and the budget strategy.

In terms of the 2012/2013 Final Outturn it was reported that overall the Council had made approximately a £191,000 net saving against its General Fund Budget for 2012/2013. It was noted that in addition to planned budget reductions of £11.8 million, further accelerated savings of £2.7 million in respect of staffing and running costs had been achieved which would contribute towards the planned budget reductions in 2013/2014.

In setting the 2013/2014 budget, identified structural budget issues had been addressed and £12.7 million reductions in service expenditure applied and extra investment of £4.3 million in key services.

The Board was advised of a detailed budget monitoring exercise which was nearing completion early indications from which identified spending pressures with regard to Wellbeing Care and Learning, and Neighbourhoods and Communities.

Overall Government expenditure in 2015/2016 was planned to reduce from £315.7 billion to £312.9 billion which represented a 2.6% reduction. From information made available in July 2013 Middlesbrough would be receiving a significantly higher reduction in Government support than the national average of 10% in 2015/2016 as a result of the Council's higher than average dependancy on Government support and in particular the impact of additional top slicing of the settlement and the higher proportional impact on the basic Revenue Support Grant entitlement. Although further details were awaited there was a proposal in 2015/2016 to passport 35% of New Homes Bonus through to Local Enterprise Partnerships (Tees Valley Unlimited) which would result in an additional circa £500,000 pressure to the Council.

The Board's attention was drawn to a number of identified potential pressures relating to safeguarding vulnerable children based on assumptions in respect of levels of demand for placements of looked after children.

Reference was also made to Adult Social Care for which an annual provision of £2.3 million had been made to deal with estimated ongoing demand led spending pressures.

Other cost pressures referred to in the report included reduced car parking charges in respect of Zetland car park; impact of the construction of a crematorium in Redcar and Cleveland; deficit in respect of income from commercial rents and charges; impact of grant changes including Homes Bonus and Council Tax benefit grants; and additional annual provision of £400,000 in respect of the Council's agreed Capital programme.

Appendix A of the report submitted outlined the expected position over the medium term 2014/2015 - 2016/2017 and Appendix B illustrated the potential impact on the Council's gross expenditure and income in 2014/2015 and for the three year period 2014/2015 to 2016/2017. An outline of the proposed budget process timetable was outlined in Appendix C of the report.

In commenting on the current assessment of budget pressures with regard to safeguarding vulnerable children Members requested further information on the budget and the measures to mitigate such pressures to ensure that there was adequate provision.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the Director of Strategic Resources be thanked for the information provided.
2. That futher information be provided on the predicted future budget pressures and on the measures that are in place to address such issues.

13/44

WELFARE REFORMS

The Middlesbrough Partnership Manager presented a report which provided an update on the impact of welfare reforms in Middlesbrough and the mitigating actions being taken.

The initial Plan included such initiatives as:-

- setting up a multi agency communications network and group;
- establishing an on line hub of resources;
- the provision of a multi agency advice service at Thorntree Community hub;
- delivery of community base advice days;
- credit union support;
- joint partnership funding bids;
- foodbank support;
- promotion of the Nellbooker electronic referral system;
- establishment of the Registered Social Landlord Forum;
- advice provided with all Council Tax bills;
- provision of staff and Councillor training; and
- a basket of indicators established to monitor potential impact.

Following a further Partnership Forum event a new action plan based on education and training, health and wellbeing; employment/the economy/private sector; Universal Credit; and financial capability had been compiled as outlined in the report submitted which had been the subject of consultation with various groups.

Councillor Harvey, Assistant Executive Member, the Executive lead on Welfare Reform advised the Board of current work which was being undertaken which included:-

- schemes being pursued under the Corporate Welfare Reform Group;
- Advice Days;
- work with the Council's public health team;
- 'Smarterbuys';
- Advice Hubs at Thorntree and Grove Hill;
- a Universal Credit Task and Finish Group;
- a Training (including Members) Task and Finish Group;
- Review of Advisory Services;
- Foodbanks.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That further evidence be sought with regard to Welfare Reforms and that arrangements be made for additional meetings of the Board when this is considered.

13/45

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AND RISK UPDATE QUARTER ONE

A report of the Director of Transformation was presented which provided an overview of the Council's performance and its corporate risk register at Quarter One 2013/2014.

The Board was advised that the Council was in the process of fundamentally reviewing its approach to performance management an update on which would be presented to a future meeting of the Board.

Following the quarterly risk review the total number of corporate risks stood at 24, two more than 2012/2013.

Members sought clarification in respect of a number of areas and emphasised the importance of invoices being paid on time.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted.

13/46

SCRUTINY PANELS -PROGRESS REPORTS

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

NOTED

13/47

SCRUTINY REVIEW REQUESTS

It was noted that no scrutiny requests had been received since the meeting of the Board held on 20 August 2013.

NOTED

13/48

CALL-IN

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

NOTED