

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

12 NOVEMBER 2013

**FINAL REPORT -
MIDDLESBROUGH ENVIRONMENT CITY**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the Environment Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of the topic of Middlesbrough Environment City.
2. This topic was investigated as a short topic over the course of one Environment Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 16 September 2013. A further panel meeting was held on 21 October 2013 to consider a draft final report. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Legal and Democratic Services co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the investigation. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
3. A record of discussions at panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Eagenda committee management system, which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
4. This report has been compiled on the basis of information submitted to the scrutiny panel by the Director of Middlesbrough Environment City.
5. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors Kerr (Chair), Clark (Vice-Chair), Brady, Cole, Davison, C Hobson, McPartland, Saunders and P Sharrocks.

THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINDINGS

6. The scrutiny panel's findings are set out below and relate to:
 - History of Middlesbrough Environment City and Use of the One Planet Living Approach.
 - MEC Projects.
 - Finance, Budget and Governance Arrangements.

History of Middlesbrough Environment City and Use of the One Planet Living Approach

7. The scrutiny panel was informed that Middlesbrough Environment City (MEC) is an independent charity that works across Middlesbrough to promote and encourage healthy and sustainable living. MEC was formed in 1992 and became an independent charity in 1997. Middlesbrough is one of only four Environment Cities in England - the others are Leeds, Peterborough and Leicester.
8. The charity works closely with Middlesbrough Council and other partners from the public, voluntary, community and private sectors. Using the One Planet Living approach, the organisation aims to deliver a diverse range of projects each year, including food growing, energy efficiency, cycling and outdoor play.
9. One Planet Living is the tool used in Middlesbrough to describe healthy and sustainable living in a simple way. The basis of One Planet Living is that if everyone on Planet Earth consumed resources as we do in the UK, we would need three planets to sustain us. As we have only one planet, we need to reduce our use of resources, but in a way that improves Quality of Life and (especially in the current times of austerity) also saves money. One Planet Living consists of ten easy to understand principles that enable individuals, communities and organisations to become more sustainable. Middlesbrough is one of only three local authorities in the country to be accredited as a One Planet Region by the international charity Bioregional.
10. It was indicated that in the current economic climate, it is more important than ever to ensure the prudent use of resources and enable Middlesbrough's residents to play an even greater part in local communities. These priorities are embraced within the One Planet vision and MEC has been involved with many examples of how actions driven by the One Planet Living programme are helping to save residents money, enable communities to make a contribution and improve quality of life for local people.
11. Most recently, MEC has secured funding of £1m for a five year project - *One Planet Middlesbrough: Creating Sustainable Communities*. This is a community engagement programme aimed at creating a sustainable One Planet Town. By engaging a greater number of residents in actions that promote sustainable living and behaviours, the project aims to improve quality of life and address the social, economic and environmental challenges faced by people in Middlesbrough.
12. One Planet Middlesbrough will be working with specific groups through projects involving organisations such as ¹CSV-RSVP, Staying Put Agency, Middlesbrough MIND and Shopmobility. Community engagement will be improved through projects with Groundwork North East, Tees Valley Arts and West Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Trust. Groundwork North East, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and Community Ventures Ltd will be greening businesses and developing new business models. Demonstration projects will be completed with Middlesbrough Council's Safe and Active Travel Team, West Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Trust and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

¹ Community Service Volunteers- Retired and Senior Volunteers Programme.

13. It was explained that within its first six months, seven Community Champion Volunteers joined the project. The project team was at the forefront of consultation and engagement in respect of the review of the Middlesbrough Affordable Warmth Action Plan; has developed a series of 11 training courses on sustainability designed to enhance knowledge and develop skills; worked with five schools on a variety of projects; worked with three community centres to help them to become more sustainable; and helped to set up three community projects.

MEC Projects

14. The panel heard details of current and past Environment City projects that have been used to help to achieve the organisation's objectives. These were highlighted as follows.
15. With regard to **tackling climate change and reducing the use of resources**, the scrutiny panel was advised that a number of projects are ongoing in this area of work. These were highlighted, as shown below.
16. Around 23% of Middlesbrough's households are living in ²fuel poverty. This is known to have consequences for health, well-being, educational attainment and the local economy. It was highlighted that fuel poverty can occur due to a number of social and economic factors, although some areas of the town have higher levels of fuel poverty due to older housing that is less energy efficient. Measures that have been used locally to address the issue include home energy efficiency initiatives, maximising income and raising awareness. The anti-fuel poverty agenda is led in Middlesbrough by the Affordable Warmth Group, which is chaired by MEC. The work of the group is guided by the Affordable Warmth Action Plan.
17. MEC's project works in partnership with other organisations to identify vulnerable residents of Middlesbrough who are currently in, or are at risk of entering, fuel poverty. They are then offer them support and advice and (where necessary) referred for energy efficiency and/ or insulation measures. In 2012/13, MEC helped install 2,959 measures including cavity wall/loft insulation and external cladding to the value of £1.5m. Over this period, MEC trained 58 residents and front-line workers to become Energy Champions, who worked with the Council to secure £90,000 from the Department of Health to provide support for older people during the winter.
18. In addition to the above, free cavity wall and loft insulation is currently being offered through government-funded schemes to any privately owned or privately rented householders in Middlesbrough, irrespective of status or any age related restrictions. External wall cladding insulation is also being offered free to properties in certain areas of Middlesbrough or to those householders who are on qualifying government benefits.

² According to the current Government definition, a household is defined as living in fuel poverty if: They have fuel costs that are above a national median level; and if they were to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

19. A free central heating boiler replacement or boiler repair scheme is also available to any privately owned or privately rented householders who are in receipt of certain government qualifying benefits. MEC offers advice and assistance in applying for these measures.
20. The panel also heard that the Department of Environment and Climate Change provided funding of approximately £400,000 for the Eco-Easterside Project. This project was aimed at reducing energy use through a combination of physical measures and behaviour change. The priority was to reduce energy consumption on the Easterside Estate through energy efficiency measures, to raise awareness and provide advice and support to local people. Installation of high profile renewable technology (eg wind turbines, photo-voltaic panels, water/air source heat pumps) to domestic properties and public buildings was carried out and a supporting programme was introduced to encourage sustainable living through active travel, food growing, waste minimisation and Eco-schools.
21. In terms of **promoting healthy lifestyles**, a number of initiatives have been developed in this area. Reference was made to the Urban Farming Partnership Programme that has been active in Middlesbrough since 2007 and is guided by the Food Sustainability Action Plan. Work includes encouraging the use of allotments, developing community growing spaces, growing skills training and developing cooking skills. To date, the Big Lottery Fund Local Food Programme has provided £300,000 of funding to MEC for this work over a three-year period. The Growing East Middlesbrough Project has engaged 3,300 people and 38 groups, provided accredited training to 66 people and supported the development of 16 community and school growing sites. The main centre for the project is Town Farm Community Allotment and Training Site.
22. Reference was also made to work that has been undertaken to encourage urban farming. Support is provided to assist community groups to start up, obtain materials and access grants and funding opportunities. Gardening training is also provided, such as mentoring schemes. These have been established at existing allotments so that experienced gardeners can support and encourage newcomers.
23. The Food Sustainability Action Plan has been developed by Middlesbrough Environment City in partnership with Middlesbrough Council as part of the One Planet Living Programme. The plan looks at four important aspects of food - local production; choosing healthy options; tackling food waste; and helping people in developing countries by choosing Fairtrade products.
24. The Action Plan contains suggestions on how Middlesbrough residents can enjoy food whilst living a healthier lifestyle, saving money and reducing their impact on the environment. Research has shown, for example, that an average family in the UK throws away over £600 of perfectly good food each year. Simple actions, such as reusing leftovers, can save money whilst also creating delicious and healthy meals.

25. Middlesbrough is at the forefront nationally in sustainable food. The town has an active community growing project with over 100 community groups growing their own produce. Some of this is used for the annual Middlesbrough Town Meal that attracts up to 10,000 people each year. Last year the Town Meal was runner up in the BBC Radio 4 Food and Farming Awards.
26. MEC has also been involved in a number of health promotions. For example, *New Life New You - BME* is a community-based project that will run until March 2014 to help to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in Middlesbrough. This project is funded by NHS Middlesbrough, Newcastle University and Tees Valley Sport.
27. Through an 8 week physical activity and dietary advice programme, the project has helped to not only reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes for participants, but encouraged a healthier, more sociable lifestyle within the Middlesbrough BME community.
28. **Sustainable transport** is an area that is also actively promoted by MEC. The Middlesbrough Cycle Centre opened in 2002 and has been located in the Bus Station since 2009. The centre provides staffed, secure cycle parking, shower facility, lockers, cycling advice and minor repairs. It is used by around 50 people each weekday during the summer and in 2012/13 the centre engaged 623 people in cycling activities, 54 of whom were new to cycling. The Centre also delivers Bikeability Safe Cycling training in Middlesbrough schools in partnership with Middlesbrough Council Safe and Active Travel, funded by the Department for Transport nationally.
29. MEC is also involved in a range of **education and awareness** activities. Tackling climate change is cross-cutting across many themes including improving health and well-being, increasing physical activity, emotional well-being and healthy eating, helping residents to save money, developing skills and improving employability, personal independence and self-reliance, improving educational attainment and placing greater value on learning, community cohesion.
30. The organisation has also been involved in some projects relating to **local heritage and the physical environment**. Although this area of work is, in the main, undertaken by Middlesbrough Council in partnership with organisations such as the Wildlife Trust and Groundwork, MEC has had involvement in general heritage projects such as the restoration of the graves of Henry Bolckow and John Vaughan and habitat improvement works at some of Middlesbrough's becks.

Finance, Budget and Governance Arrangements

31. The work of MEC is overseen by a Management Board chaired by Councillor Julia Rostron, Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health. The Board is made up of two other elected Members plus Trustees from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The Board meets four times a year and contributes to the organisation's annual business plan, as well as scrutinising MEC's project programme and finance.

32. The panel heard that MEC's total budget is currently around £550,000 per year. This is mainly funded through grants secured by the organisation, such as National Lottery Funding for projects, such as One Planet Middlesbrough: Creating Sustainable Communities (covered earlier in this report). In addition, a small amount of income is generated through contracts won by MEC.
33. MEC currently has 26 members of staff (22 full time equivalent) posts. All are paid from grant funding, except for 2.5 staff (including MEC's Director) who are seconded from Middlesbrough Council. It is acknowledged that the availability of grants is generally lessening due to the current economic climate. As the organisation is a registered charity, there is a need to ensure that any grant funding applications are relevant to MEC's work, rather than MEC trying to adapt to carry out work in other areas.

CONCLUSIONS

34. Having considered the submitted information, the Environment Scrutiny Panel reached the following conclusions:
 1. Middlesbrough Environment City (MEC) is at the forefront of promoting and championing healthy and sustainable living in Middlesbrough and is the vehicle through which the One Planet Living agenda is being taken forward locally. A lot of the organisation's work, particularly in respect of One Planet Living, is undertaken in conjunction with Middlesbrough Council. MEC has been responsible for delivering a number of successful projects, such as those in relation to addressing issues of fuel poverty/energy reduction and promoting healthy lifestyles. The organisation's work is supported by the Environment Scrutiny Panel.
 2. MEC's 22 full time equivalent posts are mainly funded through grant funding, although Middlesbrough Council seconds 2.5 staff to the organisation. Given the current economic climate, securing grant funding in the future could be increasingly problematic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

35. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:
 1. That Middlesbrough Environment City's (MEC) successes and progress, and its active involvement in delivering the One Planet Living agenda, are noted.
 2. That the Board of Middlesbrough Environment City is advised of the concerns raised regarding its future grant-funding position. In order to ensure that the organisation has a sustainable future, the Board should be requested to consider actively planning to deal with any future funding reductions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

36. The Scrutiny Panel is grateful to the following, who submitted information during the course of this investigation:

- Mark Fishpool - Director of Middlesbrough Environment City.
- Councillor Julia Rostron Chair of Middlesbrough Environment City Management Board.

BACKGROUND AND REFERENCE MATERIAL

37. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Report to and minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 16 September 2013.
- Middlesbrough Environment City website (www.menvcity.org.uk).

COUNCILLOR BOB KERR

CHAIR OF ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

November 2013

Contact Officer:

Alan Crawford
Scrutiny Support Officer
Legal & Democratic Services
Tel 01642 729707
e-mail: alan_crawford@middlesbrough.gov.uk