

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 12 November 2013.

PRESENT: Councillors Mawston (Vice-Chair) (In the Chair), C Hobson, Junier (as substitute for Councillor Dryden), Kerr, P Purvis, P Sharrocks, J A Walker and Williams

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillor Thompson, Executive Member for Children's Services.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, P Clarke, A Crawford, R Horniman and E Pout.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillor Brunton (Chair) and Councillors Cole, Dryden, McIntyre and Sanderson.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

1 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD 15 OCTOBER 2013

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 15 October 2013 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES - FINAL REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Panel outlined the Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following a scrutiny investigation of the topic of Middlesbrough Council's Bereavement Services.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on evidence submitted and conclusions reached:-

1. That, while recognising the Council's difficult financial position, the current approach of maintaining high standards of maintenance at the Council's cemeteries and crematorium is continued as far as possible in order to respect the sensitivity of this issue. While this may involve increasing fees and charges, account should be taken of the Council's Change Programme and the need to examine issues such as more efficient ways of working, or further reducing service standards in other areas.

2. That, in respect of headstone safety:

(a) The current approach is continued with costs of the necessary checks being met from cemetery and cremation fees and charges.

(b) That the position is examined in respect of the £16,000 budget that is created each year from fees and charges to deal with this issue - in particular whether this results in a budget surplus that could be used to offset, or reduce, potential increases in fees and charges.

3. That, once the private crematorium in Redcar and Cleveland becomes operational, its impact on the level of cremations at Middlesbrough Council's crematorium is closely monitored. While the Council's fees need to be competitive, services should continue to be provided at the highest possible standard, including the further use of technological innovations and improvements, as appropriate. Work should also be undertaken to review service provision to mitigate any future loss of income and to determine the possible implications of this.

4. That the position is noted in respect of:

(a) Increased burial and cremation fees due to the necessity of providing a Medical

Examiner's Certificate.

(b) Work to reduce mercury emissions from the Council's crematorium.

(c) The availability of future burial land.

(d) Grave maintenance.

Members supported the recommendations and sought clarification on a number of areas.

Reference was made to activities undertaken by The Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery a group of people largely from the local community who wished to preserve and enhance the cemetery. Members enquired as to the existence of other similar groups and/or involvement of volunteers.

It was noted that no major concerns had been raised since the announcement of certain changes to cremation service times and other planned improvements at the Chapels. Such changes included a pilot scheme which commenced in September 2013 which provided the opportunity at St Hilda's Chapel of a 40 minute rather than the current 30 minute or double (1 hour) slot currently available for a funeral service.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Environment Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

3 **MIDDLESBROUGH ENVIRONMENT CITY - FINAL REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

The Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Panel outlined the Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following a scrutiny investigation of the topic of Middlesbrough Environment City.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the evidence submitted and conclusions reached:-

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.

In considering the Final Report Members sought further clarification with particular regard to Middlesbrough Environment City's project works in partnership with other organisations in relation to fuel poverty. It was agreed that further information in regard to this would be circulated to the Board.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Environment Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

4 **ATTENDANCE OF EXECUTIVE MEMBERS - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

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 Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Children's Services to the meeting.

The Executive Member gave an indication of the areas within the portfolio, and how they related to the Mayor's Vision and drew the Board's attention to a number of areas of significant work and current challenges.

Specific reference was made to the implications on the role of the Council of an increasing number of schools transferring to academies.

Other issues raised included:-

- responsibility of the Council in terms of achievement without direct budgetary control in this regard;
- significant amount of work being undertaken with regard to identifying places for children with special education;
- continuing to make progress with regard to attainment;
- safeguarding and managing risk and associated budgetary issues;
- a delay until February 2014 of the transfer of three children's homes back to Council control in order to allow Ofsted more time to process the application for registration;
- success of specific intervention strategies such as the national Troubled Families and Fulfilling Lives programmes.

In response to acknowledgements of Members regarding the need to continue to encourage more foster carers the Executive Member referred to the numbers of in-house foster carers which had increased and confirmed the intention to have a further specific Foster Carer Campaign.

ORDERED that the Executive Member for Children's Services be thanked for the information provided.

5 **SCRUTINY REQUEST FOR REVIEW - LAND USE - ECONOMIC POSITION**

Further to the meeting of the Board held on 15 October 2013 the Executive Director, Neighbourhoods and Communities presented a report which provided further information on employment and housing land allocations to assist Members as to whether or not to pursue a topic for scrutiny investigation received by a member of the public.

It was confirmed that the allocation of land for either housing or economic use was determined by the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The current housing allocation within the LDF equated to 6,800 dwellings, the size and location of which had been determined through previous assessments of demand and supply, and through taking a long-term look at the future market for housing in the area, and the aspirations and objectives of the Council. The current allocations for employment use totalled 185 ha (including Middlehaven) and had been determined using the same process.

As the overall economy and the local housing market changed during the course of the LDF's lifetime, it was necessary to review such allocations, and the assumptions behind them periodically. Although not formally concluded, a current review of housing allocations had identified a need to accommodate 6,970 dwellings between 2013 and 2029. It was emphasised that any increased requirement for employment land identified at this stage would not necessarily come at the expense of the amount of land allocated for housing.

It was considered important to recognise that Middlesbrough was not a discrete economic entity, and was part of a wider Tees Valley employment market. The Town's economic strategy was based on securing the commercial and supply chain benefits of investment in the wider Teesside industrial base.

Specific reference was made to the Tees Valley Statement of Ambition (the overarching economic strategy for the area) which concentrated on the need for large industrial sites near to Tees Port and the existing industrial infrastructure. Middlesbrough's role as a more commercial focused area was integral to such a strategy.

As outlined in the report reference was made to significant land allocations within the LDF for future employment growth which included Middlehaven/St. Hildas, Teesside Advanced Manufacturing Park and Hemlington Grange Business Park. Although such allocations would provide sites for new development, the majority of employment within the Town was currently concentrated in either Riverside Park or the Town Centre, where sufficient capacity and vacant space also existed to accommodate significant further job growth. Major vacant office buildings in the town centre presented a particular opportunity to expand on Middlesbrough's commercial role.

It was suggested that the existing portfolio should provide the scale and scope for development commensurate for Middlesbrough's economic role and aspirations.

Subject to the ongoing review process, the allocations included within the LDF were currently considered appropriate to the balance required for the development of the housing and employment offer that Middlesbrough required to move forward.

Middlesbrough's current and future role in the Tees Valley economy was unlikely to result in the need to allocate large additional sites, nor was its sustainability likely to be constrained by a lack of available land. A more likely constraint was considered to be the lack of an appropriate housing offer to support the town's long-term economic ambitions.

ORDERED that the request for a scrutiny investigation be not pursued and the member of the public be advised accordingly.

6 **VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR AND MIDDLESBROUGH VOLUNTARY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

The Chair of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel outlined the Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following a scrutiny investigation of the topic of the local voluntary and community sector, including the role of Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA).

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the evidence submitted and conclusions reached:-

1. That, in order to maximise its effectiveness and to take into account forthcoming likely changes in local authority working arrangements and service delivery, the existing Compact Agreement between Middlesbrough Council and voluntary and community sector organisations is updated and revised.
2. That, in order to increase opportunities to engage the voluntary and community sector in service provision and to assist the Council in commissioning appropriate and cost-effective services:
 - (a) The recently produced Draft Local Framework for Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement in Commissioning is formally adopted as a positive way forward.
 - (b) The provisions of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 are used to maximum effect to ensure that services commissioned and procured improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and to direct work, wherever possible, to the voluntary and community sector. All Council service areas involved in service commissioning should be made aware of the provisions and implications of the Act.
3. That, given the possibility of further developing public sector commissioning opportunities for the voluntary and community sector, and the implications that this is likely to have on all Council service areas, the membership of the Authority's Voluntary Sector Liaison Group is widened to include greater Council service representation - for example when particular services are being reviewed as part of the Authority's Change Programme. In all cases, full consideration should be given to how/whether future service provision can involve the VCS.

4. That the wide-ranging and valuable work of MVDA in supporting the local VCS, and the validation of MVDA's work by the independent study carried out in 2011, is noted and (subject to the necessary budget considerations and process) Council core funding to MVDA is continued.

5. That MVDA is requested to undertake work on its Sector Connector database to ensure that the database is kept up to date and that the only properly constituted and bona-fide organisations are listed.

In considering the Final Report Members sought clarification regarding a number of areas which included:-

- information which could have been sought from a local voluntary and community sector organisation;
- membership and operation of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Group;
- the beneficiaries of the Carers Small Grants Fund administered by MVDA;
- extent and nature of support by MVDA to community sector based initiatives outside of Middlesbrough.

ORDERED that the recommendations of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive unless it is thought necessary to refer the report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board following discussion with the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel on the areas of clarification and possible amendment and addition of further information.

7 **SCRUTINY PANELS - PROGRESS REPORTS**

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

NOTED

8 **CALL - IN**

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

NOTED

9 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS - EMERGENCY ACCESS TO JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL**

In view of the urgency of the subject matter the Chair agreed to the inclusion of consideration of a Final Report of the Health Scrutiny Panel which outlined the Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following a scrutiny investigation of the emergency access to James Cook University Hospital.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the evidence submitted and conclusions reached:-

1. That the Police and NEAS work together to review best practice and then implement a system which enables police officers and paramedics to be able to contact each other's organisation's control rooms.
2. That NEAS ensure that the emergency services are invited to wider planning meetings.
3. That the public are made aware of the contract NEAS has with the British Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance, to seek to reassure the public that on occasions where those services' ambulances have been sent as a first response, that NEAS ambulances will also attend the scene within the target time response.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.