

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 3 February 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor N J Walker (Chair), Councillors J G Cole, C Hobson, P Sanderson, M Thompson, J A Walker and M B Williams

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillor T Harvey, Executive Member for the Environment

OFFICERS: A Crawford and P Duffy

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors E Dryden, F McIntyre, P Purvis and P Sharrocks

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

1 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 20 JANUARY 2015

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20th January 2015 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

2 ATTENDANCE OF COUNCILLOR T HARVEY - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented a report which provided information in respect of the scheduled attendance of Members of the Executive at the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

The Scrutiny Support Officer reminded the Board that the purpose of the attendance of Executive Members was to report on progress within their area and for Members to question the Executive Member in respect of their portfolio.

Today's meeting was attended by Councillor T Harvey, Executive Member for Environment. Councillor Harvey updated Members as follows:-

- She had become Executive Member 9 months ago and had made it a priority to meet with staff to find out the issues from their perspective. This included walkabouts with officers and she would be accompanying gritter teams over the next few weeks.
- Among the places/fora she had visited were Leisure Centres; the Allotment Forum; the Leisure Centre Management Committee and Parks.
- She was keen to receive the views of Members on waste services and Members views had been sought on the revised recycling proposals, as part of the consultation process.
- Recycling was more successful in some parts of the town than others. She asked that Members contact her if they had any ideas on how to increase take-up.
- Environmental enforcement was now within her remit. Educating people was a key part of this.
- A challenge was to maintain levels of street cleanliness, despite reductions in budgets.
- Residents themselves had a key role to play and in the Gresham Ward there was a scheme piloted with "Street Champions", who could report issues to the Council.

- Other big issues concerned the Trust which would be overseeing the new Sports Village at Prissick Base and the proposed Alternative Delivery Model for Environment, Property and Commercial Services.

A Member asked what Councillor Harvey's first impressions of the role were and what the main difficulties had been. She had been struck by the size of the portfolio. It was hard work but enjoyable. Fly-tipping was a particular issue.

A Member said that the areas around schools were Priority 2 for gritting. This was putting children and adults at risk. She also understood that places that were on Priority 2 did not get gritted and asked Councillor Harvey to look at making schools Priority 1. Councillor Harvey said she would look into this and would ensure that the Board was copied into any reply to the Member.

The Chair felt that street champions were a good idea and asked how long they had been in operation. Councillor Harvey said that this was a new initiative but it could be extended to other areas of the town, if the pilot in Gresham was successful.

A Member said it would be interesting to see the outcomes of the pilot, as volunteers who help need to be recognised.

A Member commented on the timings for wheelie bin collections and asked what political decisions Councillor Harvey had made. Councillor Harvey indicated that she had been closely involved in the joint venture and had signed off proposals to increase the take up of recycling. She was challenging and asked the difficult questions as she saw that as a key part of her role.

The Chair commented that there was resistance to recycling in some areas and that Ward Councillors had identified "hot spots". A targeted joint approach was being undertaken involving Erimus Housing, Ward Councillors and Enforcement Officers.

The Chair suggested that an invitation to all Councillors to visit the new Sports Village, before or after it had opened, would be beneficial. Councillor Harvey would liaise with officers about this.

A Member asked what progress there had been towards self-management of allotments. Councillor Harvey said that this was progressing well and talks were on-going.

- ✓ A Member referred to recycling "bring sites" and said that there had been a lot of dumping at Tesco in Coulby Newham. Councillor Harvey responded that this issue had arisen over Christmas and was since being addressed.

In reply to a question from a Member, Councillor Harvey confirmed that recycling rates were increasing. She would provide figures to Members. She also agreed to raise the issue of the number of potholes in roads at the Crematorium.

The Chair thanked Councillor Harvey for her presentation and for responding to questions from the Board.

3 **MAYOR'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND DIRECTION OF TRAVEL - REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

The Panel considered a report by the Chair which highlighted the Board's findings, conclusions and recommendations, following its examination of the Elected Mayor's strategic priorities and the Council's future direction of travel.

The Chair thanked the Scrutiny Support Officer for his assistance in pulling the report together.

ORDERED that the following recommendations and conclusions be fed into the special meeting of the Executive, which is to consider the budget for 2015/2016.

Conclusions

- a) The points that were raised and discussed during the Overview and Scrutiny Board's investigation illustrate that the issues highlighted by the Mayor in his strategic priorities impact on a town-wide basis and not only on Middlesbrough Council.
- b) Partners present at the 9 January 2015 Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting were supportive of the strategic priorities, although it was felt that some issues could be added. That meeting illustrated that there is a will from partner organisations to improve partnership working - for example by pooling resources - to address the particular problems faced by Middlesbrough. In addition, most partners indicated that they would welcome more scrutiny of a similar format.
- c) Accepting the Government-funded short term Council Tax Freeze Grant for 2015-16 would adversely impact on Middlesbrough Council's long-term budget position. An inflationary increase in Council tax would ensure that income is maximised and future budget reductions are not as severe as the position that would arise by accepting the Freeze Grant.
- d) The Mayor's strategic priorities, and how these will be addressed, are directly related to the Council's budget and future spending priorities. Overview and Scrutiny Board considers that the strategic priorities need to be widened to include support for young people with mental health problems; addressing the skills agenda; and increasing support for people who are financially vulnerable. There may be an opportunity for the Council and its partners to improve the provision of advice to service users/customers in respect of welfare rights/benefits issues through front line staff.
- e) The Overview and Scrutiny Board's investigation has also raised a number of issues that, although not budget-related at this stage, are matters that Overview and Scrutiny Board consider should be highlighted and considered further, either as part of the scrutiny process or by the Council's Corporate Management Team.

Recommendations relating to strategic priorities/budget

- a) That the Executive notes the Overview and Scrutiny Board's support for the strategic priorities for Middlesbrough.
- b) That the strategic priorities should also make reference to the following:
 - People who are financially vulnerable and (under the section on children) the need to increase support for young people with mental health problems; and
 - Addressing the skills agenda to meet the needs of both employers and young people.
- c) That Middlesbrough Council refuses the Government's Council Tax Freeze Grant due to its short-term nature and the resulting adverse long-term impact on Council budgets, future service provision for the people of Middlesbrough and future Council Tax levels.

NOTE: Councillor C Hobson, who was not present at the previous meeting when this matter had originally been considered, requested that it be noted she did not support recommendation c) above.

Recommendations relating to future policy development

- a) That the Executive notes that the following issues, raised during the discussions with Council partners, are recommended for future policy development, including appropriate action by the Council's Corporate Management Team:
- i. That mechanisms are put in place to improve partnership working across Middlesbrough. Consideration should be given to how the Council's partner organisations can be better involved in sharing expertise and resources for the mutual benefit of all organisations. In particular, following discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting of 9 January 2015, Council Officers should liaise further with Erimus Housing in this regard.
 - ii. That steps are taken by all partner organisations, such as provision of further training, to improve advice from frontline staff on welfare rights/benefits so that service users can be better supported on these issues, or signposted to appropriate support.

NOTE: Councillor C Hobson, who was not present at the previous meeting when this matter had originally been considered, requested that it be noted she did not support recommendations at a) i) and ii), above.

Recommendations relating to action by the Overview and Scrutiny Board

That the Executive notes the following actions agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Board:

- That, where appropriate, future scrutiny investigations include greater involvement by partner organisations.
- That the following issues, raised during the discussions with Council partners, are to be considered as possible future scrutiny topics:
 - i. The impact of budget cuts on Neighbourhood Policing.
 - ii. Changes in housing demand in the private rented sector, including the impact on registered social landlords in attracting tenants and reducing voids. (To be undertaken in the current Municipal year, if possible.)
 - iii. What attracts people to Middlesbrough?
 - iv. To what extent is Middlesbrough a thriving town?
 - v. The Skills Agenda - are education providers providing the qualifications and training to match the requirements of future employers and young people?
 - vi. South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group property portfolio - the impact on the town of building closures and service relocation.
 - vii. Demand for residential care for the elderly in Middlesbrough.

4

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION NATIONAL PROCUREMENT STRATEGY - REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

The Chair presented a report which highlighted the Overview and Scrutiny Board's findings in respect of the position concerning compliance with the Local Government Association's National Procurement Strategy in Middlesbrough.

Essentially, the Strategy encouraged Local Authorities to use their spending power to

help provide economic and social benefits. The report highlighted how Middlesbrough has, for a number of years, made good strides in this direction.

The Chair commented that, whilst there were no specific recommendations for service areas, it was beneficial to benchmark how the Council was performing in areas such as this.

ORDERED:

- a) That the Executive notes the excellent work and good progress already made over recent years in respect of utilising procurement to support local businesses and that Middlesbrough was already in an advanced position and well placed to comply with the key area of the vision, in relation to 'Supporting Local Economies', contained in the Local Government Association's National Procurement Strategy.
- b) That work is continued to build on the progress to date, in particular:
 - i. By continuing to ensure that the Council's commissioning and procurement processes are developed and reviewed to ensure that these maximise social value locally.
 - ii. By continuing to work, along with partners, to promote social value opportunities for the wider benefit of local communities.

5 EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK

A report was submitted by the Head of Democratic Services which asked the Overview and Scrutiny Board to receive the decisions of the Executive on the Environment Scrutiny Panel's Interim Report on the Future Alternative Delivery Model for Environment, Property and Commercial Services.

ORDERED that the decisions of the Executive be noted.

6 SCRUTINY PANELS PROGRESS REPORTS

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

NOTED.

7. URGENT ITEM - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD MEETING ON 9TH JANUARY 2015

The Chair referred to the meeting held at the Riverside Stadium on 9th January 2015 to consider the Mayor's strategic priorities and direction of travel, which was attended by key stakeholders. She thanked Members for attending and for having contributed in a positive manner. Feedback was that people felt that the Event had been good.

A Member commented that it would be useful to arrange meetings with partners about information sharing and Scrutiny every 6 months.