

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

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

**PRESENT:** Councillor N J Walker (Chair), Councillors J G Cole, F McIntyre, P Purvis, M Thompson and J A Walker

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor J Sharrocks, Executive Member for Children's Social Care

**OFFICERS:** A Crawford, P Duffy, J Shiel and P Slocombe,

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Hobson, L Junier, T Mawston, P Sanderson, P Sharrocks and M B Williams

**DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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

1 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2015 AND OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON 10 FEBRUARY 2015**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 3 February and of the special meeting held on 10 February 2015 were submitted and approved as correct records.

2 **ATTENDANCE OF COUNCILLOR J SHARROCKS, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

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

The intention was to enable the Board to hear from each Executive Member on progress towards objectives and priorities and any emerging issues or pressure areas within their portfolio.

Today's meeting was attended by Councillor J Sharrocks, Executive Member for Children's Social Care. Councillor Sharrocks updated the Board as follows:-

Youth Offending Service

The service has been subject to several Inspections. These had recognised continued improvements in the service and the delivery of practices to help young adults.

Lord McNally, Chair of the Youth Justice Board, had visited the service in September 2014 and had been impressed.

The service had entered into a partnership with The Prince's Trust to engage in accredited programmes to help young people go onto further education and to build up their portfolio.

A Girls' Group had been established, which was looking at gender specific issues. There was sometimes an assumption that all youth offenders were male.

A Member asked about whether the use of theatre activities had been progressed. Councillor Sharrocks said she would ascertain the position and advise the Board.

Children with Disabilities

A range of activities had been run, including trips to Flamingo Land for families during the summer holidays and Fun Clubs in October. Fun Days had also been held at the Rainbow Centre.

A Disability Matters Newsletter was circulated to 800 families and 200 staff.

Adoption and Fostering

The service had utilised the “Love Middlesbrough” publication to raise awareness about fostering and adoption.

An activity day had been held which was attended by families interested in adopting.

In recent months, 19 looked after children had been adopted by foster carers, which was encouraging.

The service was examining its processes to see if timescales could be shortened without reducing the quality of the placement.

Grant monies had been used for additional staff and promotion of the service.

Middlesbrough had 104 approved foster carers currently and the number was increasing. There were also a number of independent foster carers. Councillor Sharrocks advised that she was a Member of the Family Placement Panel.

A Member asked if there were any single parent foster carers. Councillor Sharrocks confirmed that there were. The support network was always looked at in these cases, but the placements had worked well.

There had been a number of good news stories about the service. She would consider how best these could be drawn to people’s attention.

In response to questions from a Member asking why finding foster carers for children/young adults aged 14 was difficult and what was being done to try to overcome this, Councillor Sharrocks said that people tended to prefer to adopt younger children. In terms of measures to overcome this, it was a question of priorities e.g. should money be spent directly on attempting to improve the adoption rate for this age group, or should it be spent on, say, working with families?

Child Sexual Exploitation

A briefing for Members was being held on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015. It would be repeated after the Council Elections. She hoped that this would develop into training.

A Member highlighted that training was available for drivers transporting vulnerable people.

Teenage Pregnancy

The numbers were reducing from what was a high basepoint.

There was also a need to look at “planned pregnancies” to put out the message that people can wait, via initiatives such as the “Why risk it?” campaign.

Social Worker links to schools in Middlesbrough had been successfully piloted and this would be extended.

A Member asked how the service was faring in view of the pressures it faced. Councillor Sharrocks responded that reviewing caseloads, to look at how they were progressed, including early intervention, was assisting. She would like working with families to help people become good parents to be developed, as some found this difficult.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sharrocks for informing the Board about her work and for answering Members’ questions.

**3 REVENUE BUDGET 2015/2016**

The Chief Financial Officer presented a report concerning the recommended Revenue Budget, Council Tax and Prudential Indicators for 2015/2016.

He took Members through the report and highlighted the following aspects, in particular:-

- The Council would consider the Mayor's recommendations at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015.
- An extensive consultation had been undertaken on the Mayor's 51 proposals, which equated to proposed savings £14.1 million in 2015/2016.
- The Mayor had confirmed that all proposals would stand, although the proposal relating to the camera enforcement initiative on the bus lane on Newport Road, would be modified. Drivers who did not keep the bus lane clear would be fined.
- The budget calculations were extremely robust.
- He was recommending that the level of reserves be at a minimum of between £4 million and £4.5 million.
- The inflation figure was contractual inflation – which was the real cost to Middlesbrough. For instance, the projected number of people in care homes.
- The Mayor was proposing additional monies for safeguarding and children's care (based on assumptions on levels of demand) and for adult social care (in respect of unavoidable demand led pressures).
- Each of the proposals had been subject to an Impact Assessment. These were appended to the report.
- Implementation of the proposed living wage would benefit 965 of the lowest paid Council staff.
- Any interest payable by the Council on loans was charged to its revenue account. Currently 9.8% of that budget was taken up with paying interest. This was within the recommended figure of 10%

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Financial Officer confirmed that:-

- The level of the Council's reserves was appropriate. Its level placed it in the bottom 10% of Authorities.
- Projections had been based on all of the available evidence.
- Loans were taken out via the Public Works Loans Board at an interest rate of 5% to 5.5%.

The Chair commented that the extra £4.6 million investment in key services, referred to at paragraph 36 of the report, was more about responding to increased demand, rather than investment in new services. She suggested that this be described as demand led funding in future.

It was suggested that the Chair make the following points to the Council when it considered the budget:-

- The Board had looked at the Mayor's Strategic Priorities and supported these with some additions.
- The Board feel that the Government's proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant should not be accepted.
- The Board feel that the budget process has been robust. For instance, it has had several opportunities to challenge the Strategic Priorities upon which the budget is based.

ORDERED that the comments of the Chair, as set out in the bulleted points above, be approved and fed back by her to the Council when it considers the budget.

**4 CAPITAL APPRAISAL & REVIEW 2014/2015**

The Deputy Chief Financial Officer submitted a report relating to the outcome of the review of the Council's Capital Programme.

The review had commenced in May 2014 and was designed to ensure that capital investment was aligned to Council priorities; outcomes and the achievement of the Mayor's Vision.

All Members and service areas were asked to put forward suggestions for new projects - 28 suggestions had been received from 16 Members of the Council.

Proposals were then sifted and amalgamated to determine those that would be fully appraised. The 20 recommended projects, costing £12.1 million, would be funded from surplus resources in the current capital programme.

A Member commented positively on the process generally. However, he was disappointed at the lack of feedback from officers on the proposals that he had submitted. The Deputy Chief Financial Officer advised that the intention had been that Members would receive feedback. It was confirmed that this issue would be addressed.

ORDERED that the list of appraised capital projects, as set out at Appendix A to the report, for inclusion into the capital programme and the continuation of the three medium term plan savings projects, detailed at paragraph 9 of the report, be noted.

**5 EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered a report by the Head of Democratic Services which provided them with the opportunity to consider whether any Item within the Executive Forward Work Programme (a copy of which was appended to the report) should be considered by the Board or referred to a Scrutiny Panel.

ORDERED that the content of the Executive Forward Work Programme be noted.

**6 FEEDBACK FROM EXECUTIVE - 17 FEBRUARY 2015**

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 final report on the Maintenance of Open Spaces.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Panel for his work on this.

ORDERED that the decisions of the Executive be noted.

**7 SCRUTINY PANELS PROGRESS REPORTS**

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