

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 30 October 2018.

PRESENT: Councillors J Sharrocks (Chair), D P Coupe, E Dryden, L Lewis, J McGee, L McGloin, M Saunders, M Storey and J A Walker.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: M Carr (Executive Member for Children's Services)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: A. Metcalfe (Press).

OFFICERS: S Bonner, S Chouhan, H. Watson, I. Wright.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor A Hellaoui, Councillor T Higgins, Councillor T Mawston.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared at this point in the meeting.

1 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 2 OCTOBER

A moment silence was observed to respect the passing of Councillor Peter Purvis, Member for Brambles and Thorntree Ward.

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

2 BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS - OUTLINE

The Governance and Information Manager presented the report on the budget consultation process for the Annual Revenue budget. As part of the presentation the following points were made:

- The standard process for consultation was identified in Paragraph 4 of the report and followed a set path; beginning in November/ December with the publication of draft proposals for a balanced budget. This was followed in December/ January with analysis. Endorsement of the annual budget by Executive followed in February with ratification by full Council in March.
- In addition to this process, there would now be an additional three appendices to the annual budget report that (detailed at paragraph seven in the report presented to the Board). The inclusion of these appendices would make it clearer which initiatives required impact assessments.
- The budget consultation process would now include publicity material for community hubs and elected Members, including a card containing information about how residents could contact the Council to make representations.
- Direct emails to community Councils would also be undertaken.
- Depending on the nature of the proposals the Council may choose to conduct specific online consultations, for example should a service be significantly affected by a proposal

It was discussed and agreed that promotional information, namely cards that could be issued to residents, were to be created by the Strategy, Information and Governance department and distributed to Members via Democratic Services.

It was also agreed that draft cards would be mocked up to be reviewed by Members before distribution.

A Member queried why there was no detail provided about legal requirements with regard to. It was clarified that the Council meets the minimum requirements when consulting, and

consulted above what was legally required.

It was clarified that a web-link, to be provided to Members, would direct residents directly to the Council's consultation portal on specific proposals, where relevant.

It was also clarified that the Information and Governance Manager had oversight of the consultation, the representations made and the analysis presented to Members. It was agreed that feedback about the response rate of the next consultation process, compared to previous consultations, would be included the budget report when it is presented to OSB.

ORDERED:

1. That promotional cards that can be given to residents, be created by the Strategy, Information and Governance department to print themselves or printed for them by Democratic Services upon request that provide information on how residents can comment on the budget proposals.
2. That a draft publicity card be created for Members to review.
3. That feedback on the response rate to the consultation process, relative to previous years, be included in the next budget report due to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Board in February.

3

CHILDREN'S SERVICES - SERVICE PRESSURES UPDATE

The Director of Children's Services, the Head of Strategic Services and the Head of Financial Planning delivered a presentation to OSB on the challenges facing Children's Services and plans to mitigate them.

As part of the presentation the following points were made:

- The Local Government Association commissioned Newton Europe to undertake research around the variation in spending between Local Authorities.
- Nationally there was an estimated funding shortfall of £2 billion by 2020.
- There was a difference in spending between Councils, due to factors including deprivation levels.
- The Newton Europe Report highlighted five factors, outside of the Council's control, that contributed to the difference in spend: Deprivation, Population size between 0-25, Disposable Household Income, Unemployment and Crime.
- Middlesbrough suffered from a number of those factors.
- Nationally, the numbers of children in care were at record levels, numbering 76,270 as of March 2017. This was an incremental increase compared to previous years (70,440 and 69,480 respectively).
- According to Department for Education figures this was the fastest rate of increase for five years.
- Looked After Children accounted for 70% of total national spending on Children's Services.
- The Newton Europe report showed that spending could be reduced if the following factors were examined: avoiding care episodes, preventing drift in case work, ensuring the best setting for the child and plans based on sound assessments.
- Locally, the Council's budget was just under £30 million in 2017/18 for Children's Services, with an overspend of £1.55 million. There was a forecasted overspend on the 2018/19 budget.
- While there was a 5% overspend locally compared to a 10% overspend nationally the local budget was already high.
- Spending in Children's Services was the largest challenge to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- In 2010/ 11 Children's Services accounted for 14% of the Council's budget, whereas this was now 30%.

A question was raised regarding how the Council planned to meet the challenge. It was confirmed that the Council had chosen to place additional funds into Children's Services in order to protect some of the town's most vulnerable people. The extra funds were also made available in an attempt to prevent families from getting into a position where Children's Services needed to intervene.

A concern was raised that there seemed to be difficulty in securing effective prevention. It was confirmed that there was a number of complex factors that presented challenges in this regard, including demography and differences in Court procedures between Council areas. It was also confirmed that the transformation plans currently in place were not a quick fix.

It was also confirmed that despite the challenges children were safe, and this was confirmed with Ofsted inspections carried out in the summer. It was also commented that while prevention was key, budgets for early help provision had been reduced significantly since 2010. However, early help teams were now part of Children's Services and could be examined as a whole.

- There were a number of demand pressures that affected Children's Services.
- The issue of Exclusions were being examined as these were high.
- There were currently 493 Looked After Children and this number was slowly decreasing.
- 244 children were subject to Child Protection Plans and 925 classed as Children in Need.
- In terms of referrals received (where a child was seen as being at risk), Middlesbrough rated at 860 per 10,000 children aged under 18 years and for Assessments Completed Middlesbrough rated at 922.6 per 10,000 of Children under 18 years. These figures were the highest in the North East.
- There was Transformation Programme in place that had an improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, as well as an Improvement Plan.
- Many aspects of Children's Services were now subject greater scrutiny in the form of audits.
- A new post of Finance and Performance Director was due to be filled which would assist the significant work of looking at unit costs in order to improve efficiencies.
- There was a desire to try and place children within Middlesbrough Council's remit rather than third party organisations.

A question was raised that if services were brought back within the Council's remit in an effort drive down costs would this be better for the children involved. It was confirmed that the Transformation Programme was outcome driven rather than cost driven, so the best interests of children would always be a primary consideration. However it was recognised that a balance needed to be achieved in order to satisfy the needs of children versus budgetary constraints.

- The Transformation Programme was underpinned by the 'Believe in Families' approach, which had been in place since June 2017. There were a range of different programmes there were running to support this, including the Edge of Care Service.
- It was noted that of the 11 places in Council ran Care Homes, only 5 spaces were used for the majority of the year, due to children's specific needs. There were significant costs associated with this situation.
- Another programme was Signs of Safety that was an international, evidence based, piece of work. It was intended this would be the underpinning framework for Social Work Teams.
- The Believe in Families programme was strength and evidenced based which would enable the workforce to flourish and deliver the required targets.
- It was noted that the plans and programmes in place would not provide a quick fix, and may take several years to be fully realised.

A query was raised regarding the impact on staff and how the Transformation Programme would assist them. It was confirmed that through staff surveys and other engagement with

staff, the service was keen to reduce the burden of workload and to mitigate any emotional distress they may face. It was also noted that workloads for Social Workers had been brought into line with national standards and that previous Ofsted inspections had stated that despite high workloads staff morale, by and large, was high.

It was also commented that much of the work as part of the Transformation Programme would help to break down barriers between the different areas of Children's Services and that the impact of the programme was already being realised.

A question was raised about the level of control the Council could exert over private sector providers. It was confirmed that the Council had little control over such things, although any private organisations would need to register with the regulator. In instances where the Council contracted with private providers it was confirmed that the Council was satisfied with their quality.

Thanks was offered to the staff in Children's Services for the work they undertook, and for the strategic planning that had been produced. However, it was commented that many of the challenges facing Children's Services were outside of the Council's control and were all interconnected.

A question was raised if the plans presented were possible and if the Council should be working more closely with other Councils in a similar way to the South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group.

It was confirmed that the Transformation Programme would work within Middlesbrough and there was no likelihood of major Local Government restructuring. However, there were opportunities for Tees Valley cross working including the Front Door initiative, a multi agency children's hub, which would be shared between Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Councils from April 2019.

ORDERED:

1. That the Newton Europe report be circulated to the Board.
2. That the information presented by Children's Services be noted.

4

FINAL REPORT OF THE AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL - COUNCIL TAX PROCESSES IN MIDDLESBROUGH

The conclusions and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel were outlined following a scrutiny investigation of Council Tax Collection Processes in Middlesbrough.

Members discussed the benefits of returning Council Tax Collection processes to the Council and recognised the need for future services to be able to measure the impact of collection on residents, especially in respect of changes to the benefits system.

It was also commented that there was a need for the Council to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure collection processes were as effective as they could be. An example of how the Department of Work and Pensions was working with Councils was cited in that residents were being signposted to which benefits they were entitled to ensure as much help as possible was being offered.

The Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel recommended:

1. To ensure alignment with the Council's Social Regeneration agenda, when Council Tax services return to the Council's purview it should explore ways of changing communications and interactions with residents experiencing Council Tax debt.
2. The Council should follow, and build on, work already undertaken by Kier and ensure

- any initiatives are multi-team in their approach.
3. Any Improvement to the collection processes should look to include key stakeholder such as the Financial Improvement Group.
 4. Continue with work undertaken by Kier in terms of service restructuring to ensure service delivery is efficient and effective.
 5. For the relevant Service Area to update the Panel on progress within 1 year of the collection processes returning to the Council

ORDERED:

1. That the findings and recommendations of Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

5 EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive submitted a report which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive as outlined in Appendix A to the report.

The report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to consider whether any item contained within the Executive Forward Work Programme should be considered by the Board or referred to a Scrutiny Panel.

NOTED**6 SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS UPDATES**

The Chair of Middlesbrough Health Scrutiny updated the Board on the work of Health Scrutiny and discussed the following issues:

- Middlesbrough Health Scrutiny continued to look at Orthodontic Service procurement and water fluoridation and breast radiology diagnostic services.
- Working with the Planning service, Middlesbrough Health Scrutiny had recommended to develop supplementary planning policies that would require any applications for hot food takeaways to complete a Health Impact Assessment. As part of this work, hot food takeaways would not be allowed to open within 400 metres of a school.
- It was also noted that, regarding respite services and the referral of the issue to the Secretary of State, the families and carers had been informed that respite care could be booked until September 2019.
- A meeting was held with the Director of Adult Social Care after which it was agreed a meeting with the CCG should be arranged to discuss the issue of Continuing Health Care budgets.
- The Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Panel discussed the recommissioning of improving access to psychological therapies as well as the regional and Local Health Scrutiny Committee Work programmes.
- The Chair also updated the Board on the new STP joint scrutiny committee arrangements.

The Chair of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel informed OSB that the panel was about to receive its final report into LGB&T issues in elderly care. A task and finish group had also been established to undertake a review of Roseberry Park with meetings held on the 6 September and 29 October to discuss progress and visits held to view remedial work being carried out. The Chair of the Panel was working with the Chair of Health Scrutiny on this issue.

The Chair of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel informed OSB that the final report of its investigation into holiday hunger was being drafted and should be completed by the Panel's meeting in November. Work continued on the Feast of Fun initiative, in conjunction with Teesside University. The panel's next topic would be Children and Young People's mental health.

The Chair of Culture & Communities Scrutiny Panel informed OSB that the coordinator of the Youth Employment Initiative, the coordinator for the Routes to Work Programme and the coordinator for Schools provided for English and Maths and ESOL all appeared at the Panel's last meeting. The panel was seeking further information about three projects that help individuals into work. The Youth Employment Coordinator was accompanied by three young people, including a Democratic Services apprentice, who should be applauded for their courage when speaking to the Panel.

The Chair OSB advised the Board that the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel's next topic would be Isolation and Loneliness in young people.