

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 5 September 2019.

PRESENT: Councillors J Thompson (Chair); Councillors Coupe, Hellaoui, Higgins, McIntyre, Rathmell, Uddin and Hubbard (As Substitute) and Purvis (As Substitute).

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Cllr C Hobson (Executive Member for Finance and Governance).

OFFICERS: S Bonner, J Bromiley.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillors; McTigue, Platt, Saunders, M Storey, C Cooke and Mawston.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made at this point in the meeting.

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JULY 2019

The Chair of OSB reminded the Board that should any Member wish to they could arrange a one-to-one meeting to discuss any scrutiny issues they feel the Chair of OSB could be of assistance with.

Cllr Hubbard advised that the Minutes of 16 July 2019 did not reflect Cllr Saunder's attendance at OSB.

ORDERED:

1. That the minutes of July 16 2019 be changed to reflect that Cllr Saunders was in attendance at that meeting;
2. The above notwithstanding that the Minutes be accepted as a true record.

2 EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE: FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

The Executive Member for Finance and Governance accompanied by the Strategic Director for Finance Governance and Support provided the Board with an update about activities within their portfolios, and made the following points:

- The Executive Member for Finance and Governance stated that within her portfolio included the following services: Human Resources; Payroll; Legal Services; Democratic Services; ICT; Business Continuity and Risk Management; Customer Services and Complaints; Information Governance; Performance Management; Project and Programme Management; Financial Management; Procurement; Investment Strategy; Valuation and Estates; Teesside Pension Fund; Council Tax and Housing Benefits; Insurance and Information Security.
- The Executive Member was hoping to meet with as many staff from the different services as possible.
- Examination of Council's budgets with the relevant accountants and that this was an ongoing process.
- One of the primary objectives for the Council was to enhance its cultural offer. The Council's budget in this area was £14m for 2019/20, however it was still costing the tax payer £5m per year and the Council needed to take more opportunities to boost income in this area.
- While work was continuing in this regard, it was a slow process.
- The Revenues service had been brought back within the Council's remit and had explored different ways of working.
- It was confirmed that Revenue Services were working on improving ways in which it

used bailiffs. A report was due in the near future that would explain how this would improve Council Tax collection.

- Another service that was exploring new ways of working was ICT which included video conferencing, which, it was hoped, would help to reduce travel expenses.

A Member queried if the difficulties in recruitment to specialist roles, such as Legal Services and Social Care, were being addressed. As part of this it was also queried if the Council's offer in these areas was being improved as this would help to both attract and retain new staff.

It was confirmed that this was being examined carefully and there was an intention to eliminate casual staff. It was also confirmed that ICT experienced similar issues to Legal and Social Care and that the issue was being looked at imaginatively to overcome the problem. However, it was commented that the Council is in a competitive market, and the Council could find itself escalating the costs.

A Member queried what involvement the Council had with the Big Screen in Centre Square. It was agreed that this information would be sent to the Member separately.

A Member queried where the most substantial pressures were for Council budgets. It was confirmed that Council needed to achieve its agreed budgetary targets as failure to do so could lead to further cuts. A discussion took place regarding the deficit, and it was confirmed that at Quarter 1 the predicted overspend for 2019/20 was £360,000. This took into account those areas that were both over and underspending.

It was also confirmed that the largest pressure on the Council's budget was overspending in Children's Services. It was also commented that in largely urban authorities the most substantial budget pressures concern Children's Services, whereas in largely rural authorities the main pressure was Adult Services.

A Member queried if those overspent budgets were being monitored. It was commented that this was a difficult area to monitor due to the uncertainty around how many children will come under the care of the Council from week to week.

A Member commented that the work carried out by staff was recognised by both the public and Members. It was commented that while significant pressures existed, there were also areas the Council could alleviate those pressures, such as the cultural spend of £5m, but that this was a slow process.

The Strategic Director for Finance Governance and Support provided Members with an overview of his service and raised the following points:

- There continued to be uncertainty around finances from central government, despite the latest spending round introducing extra money for Adult Social Care. This was only a one year settlement and required analysis to establish if any of that award was new money and what conditions needed to be met.
- The settlement from central government was continuing to decrease, with the National Audit Office stating that Middlesbrough's finances have decrease 36% in real terms since 2010.
- A Member queried if this was comparable to other areas and it was confirmed that Hartlepool had the highest decrease in the Tees Valley since 2010, which stood at 37% with the national average being 29%.
- A further challenge for Finance, Governance and Support was the maintenance of good governance around the Change Programme and ensuring that savings were realised.
- Brexit remained a challenge, and the Strategic Director for Finance, Governance and Support was the Council's lead on Brexit preparations and reported on a weekly basis the Council's position. The Council was also part a regional network that looked at what regional challenges existed. It was commented that it difficult to plan without understanding what Brexit would look like.

- A positive for the department was the way it worked with other partners both within the Council and outside to support service delivery.
- Council's had been expected to retain business rates locally, instead of receiving funding from government. However this was suspended for 2019/20 due to the settlement recently awarded. It was also commented that the impact of retaining business rates was uncertain, as Middlesbrough's business growth was not as high as other places.
- There was also a need to improve Middlesbrough's Council Tax collection rate both in-year and overall, but this needed to be done with limited resources.
- There was a need to look at effective Member engagement and which systems best enabled this, such as the One Stop Shop.
- There was also a need to examine ways to better counter cyber-attacks.

A Member commented that Middlesbrough's position in Council Tax collection league tables was symptomatic of Middlesbrough residents being unable to pay their Council Tax. It was queried if more detail could be provided about the Council use of bailiffs.

It was confirmed that a report detailing this was being created which would see bailiffs changing their titles and being more sensitive to resident's resources.

A discussion took place about how the Introduction of Universal Credit could compound the problem of how effectively the Council could collect Council Tax. It was commented that while there was a general correlation between deprivation and Council Tax collection this was not linear and needed further analysis.

A Member commented that a new approach to Bailiff use could be effective in addressing Council Tax collection as it would allow for greater insight into individuals' circumstances.

With regard to the latest spending round and new money for Social Care it was confirmed that this was a one-off payment of £1 billion for all Councils and it was unclear how this would be distributed. It was also commented that Central Government was also consulting on a Social Care precept, which could raise approximately £500 million across the Country if Councils decided to take this up.

A Member queried the status of the Council's loans repayment and if any loans had come to an end. Previous information placed the Council's loans amount at £145 million, with £4.5 million in interest payments in 2018/19. It was agreed that a separate answer would be provided on Council loans, but that it was unlikely there had been a substantial change in circumstances.

The Board thanked the Executive Member and Strategic Director for their attendance.

ORDERED:

1. That information about the Council's involvement with the Big Screen in Centre Square be provided;
2. That information relating to the Council's loan payments be provided and
3. That information provided to the board be noted.

3 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Officer provided an overview of the Scrutiny Work Programme 2019/20, as agreed by individual Scrutiny Panels.

In summary the work topics for each panel were:

Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel
Full Review

- Social Care Support for Older Carers (carried over from 2018/19)
- Physical Activity for Older People (aged 65+); and
- Palliative and End of Life Care (from and Adult Social Care perspective)
- Access to Wheelchair Services

Updates

- Reducing Loneliness and/or Social Isolation in Later Life
- The LGB&T Community and Elderly Care

Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Addressing poverty issues and the impact on learning
- Parental engagement

Short Review

- Education of immigrant children

Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Demand on Children's Social Care Services – (to include Development of Edge of Care Provision and residential homes)
- Support for Care Leavers
- Youth provision – task and finish groups

Updates

- Update on new arrangements for Local Safeguarding Children's Board
- Update on South Tees Multi Agency Children's Hub

Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Financial inclusion and Foodbanks
- Community Integration

Updates

- Selective Landlord Licensing
- Domestic Abuse
- Cleveland Police project Operation Phoenix
- Homelessness

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Infrastructure Delivery (including Broadband, Transport, Local Plan)
- Recycling and Waste Management/Waste Disposal Facility
- Teesside Crematorium (impact of new Crematorium at Stockton)

Updates

- M Homes and Forward Plan
- Snow Centre
- Boho Digital Expansion Site
- Centre Square

- Historic Buildings and local conservation area protection
- Flood Risk

Health Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome / Hypermobility Spectrum Disorder: Co-ordinating Care in South Tees
- Opioid dependency: An emerging issue
- Tackling poor oral health in children

It was commented that should OSB disagree with any of the Work Programme it should be communicated, along with specific reasons to the relevant Panel as quickly as possible.

ORDERED: That the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2019/20 be agreed.

4 **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.

The Democratic Services Officer advised the Board of the nature of the Forward Work Programme and that it was a standing item on OSB's agenda.

ORDERED: That the information provided be noted.

5 **ROLE OF AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL**

The Board discussed the role of Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel with regard to what work streams it would examine versus OSB.

The Board agreed that OSB should continue in its role as a strategic body for Scrutiny and should not undertake specific scrutiny reviews. It was reaffirmed that the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel should, in consultation with the Chairs of OSB and individual panels, continue to carry out scrutiny reviews that are cross cutting and/ or those requiring attention within a short timescale.

ORDERED: That Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel continue to carry out scrutiny reviews that are cross cutting and/ or those requiring attention within a short timescale.

6 **SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS REPORT**

The Chair of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel advised the Board that the Panel's first topic would be Food Banks and how they were organised, levels of demand and staff training. This topic was tied in with the Mayor's intention of wanting a hunger free Middlesbrough.

The Vice Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel advised OSB that, given recent issues with West Lane Hospital the Panel was due to hear from relevant representatives. The details of that meeting would be brought back to the next OSB meeting.

The Vice Chair for the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel advised the Board that the Panel was currently looking at Infrastructure Delivery and had

received an update from the Director of Regeneration, the Head of Transport and the Head of Planning and Development. The Panel heard that while there was good work being carried out, the Council was trying to live within its means and that resources were limited. This meant that when schemes were put forward they were delivered in the best way possible based on the resources available at that time.

ORDERED: That the information provided be noted.

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. The Board was advised of changes to regional scrutiny arrangements and approval was sought for those changes. The recommendations put before OSB were:

- Amending, as necessary, the remits of the two 'Sustainable Transformation Plan' Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the North and the South to include scrutiny of Integrated Care System and relevant Integrated Care Partnerships and organisational arrangements as appropriate.
- That the North East Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is put into abeyance so that should there be a time when there is a need for the 12 North East Local Authorities to come together to scrutinise a health issue then we would already have a structure in place to allow this.
- That officers in the South of the Region further examine/clarify the roles of the Tees Valley Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the 'Sustainable Transformation Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committees' for the South to avoid any duplication going forwards.
- That work will be carried out to facilitate further changes if it becomes clear that the above is no longer appropriate.

A Member commented that some of the recommendations seemed to be targeted at eliminating duplication, and while this was understandable there were instances where different scrutiny panels had different target audiences. Therefore some information would be repeated but this was sometimes required in order to reach as many people as possible in different geographic areas.

2. A Member brought the Board's attention to an initiative organised by Cleveland Fire Support Network that aimed to provide basic First Aid training for 5-11 year olds. This was directed through primary schools and the Board was asked if they could communicate through their respective networks. It was also recommended that the Democratic Services Officer circulate the information to all Members.

ORDERED:

1. That the recommendations for changes to regional health scrutiny arrangements be noted and approved.
2. That the information presented about basic first aid to Children aged 5-11, delivered by Cleveland Fire Support Network, be circulated to all Members.