

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 11 June 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors J Thompson (Chair), M Storey (Vice-Chair), C Cooke, D P Coupe, L Garvey, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, J McTigue, J Platt and M Saunders and Z Uddin

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Executive Member for Environment - Councillor D McCabe

Members of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel:-

Councillor M Saunders, Councillor B A Hubbard, Councillor R Arundale, Councillor D J Branson and Councillor S Walker

OFFICERS: C Benjamin, S Bonner, C Breheny, G Cooper, G Field, C Lunn, S Reynolds, T Parkinson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor T Mawston and Councillor C McIntyre.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations interests made at this point in the meeting.

1 MINUTES - OSB - 21 MAY 2020

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the minutes would be forwarded to the next scheduled meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board (2 July 2020) for approval.

NOTED**2 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.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

3 MAYOR'S UPDATE

The Board was advised that the Mayor had been invited to attend the meeting, but had declined.

The Mayor would be invited to the next scheduled meeting on 2 July 2020 in order to provide an update.

NOTED**4 MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL COVID-19 - RESPONSE AND RECOVERY PLAN**

The Chief Executive delivered a presentation to the Board in respect of Covid-19 and the Council's Response and Recovery Plan, which would be considered by the Executive on 16 June 2020.

The presentation covered the following topics:

Update: Covid-19 Direct response - the Board was advised that:

- Although numbers were falling, Middlesbrough remained relatively high in national rankings for rate of infection and deaths;
- The response was going well to date;
- The Business Support Grant process was operating well and a discretionary element had been introduced;
- Shielding hubs continued, but demand had dipped;
- Staff support was being enhanced through provision of equipment, etc.; and
- Finances remained a major concern.

Local Area Outbreak Plans - Members heard that:

- Every upper-tier Local Authority was required to develop a plan during June that put in place systems to manage and contain Covid-19 outbreaks within their geographical area. Eleven Councils had been selected to form a Good Practice Network (GPN) and to act as 'Beacon's' - Middlesbrough was one of them;
- Plans needed to be centred around seven themes: Care homes and schools; High risk places, locations and communities; Local testing capacity; Contract tracing in complex settings; Data integration; Vulnerable people; and Governance and Local Boards;
- The plan was structured around an interconnected Strategic Command Group, a Local Outbreak Engagement Board, and a Health Protection Board;
- The plan needed to be intelligence-led in order to: Plan and prepare for outbreak scenarios; Prevent, minimise and manage outbreaks; Support vulnerable people; Ensure services worked for all communities; Delivered Tier 1b Contact Tracing; and for Deployment of testing; and
- In order to achieve the best chance of success, the Council required: Sufficient testing capacity to meet projected demand; Quick turnaround of tests; Data at very regular intervals providing the detail of positive tests within the local area; Powers to enable local lockdowns; and The money to implement the plan.

Following the presentation, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions and the following issues were raised.

A Member of the Board queried whether figures were yet available as to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances and if a cumulative figure in terms of shortfall was yet known? The Chief Executive advised that calculating the financial impact was a hugely complex task with new arising all the time. The Council was fairly confident that there would not be financial pressures in the 2019/20 budget but that the pressures would come in 2020/21. A greater degree of confidence, however, was needed in the figures prior to quoting any numbers that maybe inaccurate. The financial impact of Covid-19 would be factored into the budget setting process for 2020/21 and the closer to completion of that process the higher the degree of confidence in the final figures. Informal discussions in respect of the budget setting process would commence with Executive in the coming weeks and it was anticipated that ideally figures could be presented to Scrutiny by the end of October / November 2020.

Reference was made to the fact that Middlesbrough had not been successful in bidding for the government's £9 million 'holiday activities and food programme' and this would mean that many children would receive no support over the summer holidays. It was queried whether the Council would be providing any funding to fill this gap and whether it would be lobbying government further to fund food and activity support over the summer holidays as they did over the Easter and Half Term? The Chief Executive advised that it was really disappointing that the Council had not been successful in the bidding process. However, the Council had allocated funding to these schemes to ensure all children in Middlesbrough received at least one decent meal a day. The Council would certainly be lobbying for increased funding and was aware of how many families had benefited from the holiday activities and food programme.

A Member of the Board queried what action the Council was taking to ensure easy access to the town centre for commuters and other visitors, given the difficulties in using public transport at this particular time? The Chief Executive advised that a detailed plan for the opening of the town centre had been prepared. Signage and floor markings had been installed in

pedestrianised with a number of enhanced drop off points in place. An app had also been developed to encourage safe movement around the town centre. As of yet it was unknown how many people would arrive upon the reopening. In terms of funding there was approximately £435,000 available at the Tees Valley level for improving access arrangements. It was queried whether any arrangements had been made for additional car parking facilities. The Chief Executive advised that in terms of the Council's own staff there were now circa 1000 staff working from home that previously would have been in the office. It was therefore anticipated that sufficient town centre car parking spaces would be available.

In terms of testing for Covid-19 it was queried how many people were employed to undertake the virus testing? Who trained them? Were any members of Middlesbrough Council staff enrolled into this job? When would the testing start and would groups be tested first? The Chief Executive advised that there were currently no Middlesbrough Council staff employed as part of the virus testing regime. However, as Covid-19 Local Outbreak Plans were developed a greater level of local control would be achieved. The detail of the Local Outbreak Plans were currently being formulated. At present there were a number of different pillars of testing. Pillar 1 involved the local NHS testing patients in hospitals and Pillar 2 was contracted out to Deloitte's to undertake local testing such as the drive through arrangements established at Teesside Park. No Council staff were employed in facilitating these tests. In addition mobile testing facilities were currently being developed, which may or may not involve Council staff. It was advised that members of the public could order a home test. However, the test was quite intrusive and uncomfortable. The results were currently fed through the National Biosecurity Centre where it was determined whether an individual was Covid-19 positive.

A Member of the Board queried how many Covid-19 deaths there had been in Middlesbrough and whether anyone had been discharged from hospital to our Care Homes without being tested for the virus? The Chief Executive advised that across the UK individuals had been discharged from hospitals to Care Homes without first being tested for COVID-19. Routine hospital testing did not commence until 16 April 2020 and a percentage of the tests undertaken had also provided false negatives. The number of individuals were not yet known.

In respect of the data provided to Members by the Director of Health (South Tees) following the last meeting of the Board it was queried as to when would it be possible for the 'R' rate figures to be broken down into postcodes or wards to provide a more localised analysis. The Chief Executive advised that access to data had been one of the most challenging and frustrating elements of dealing with Covid-19. The Council had been unable to access the information as quickly, regularly or at granularity required. A new data set was due to be provided next week. However, more information at a regular interval was required as the data currently provided was only part of the overall picture and no postcode data was provided.

The Chief Executive stated that assurance from Government was required in respect of the Covid-19 test and trace data being provided to Local Authorities. Currently only Pillar 1 data was being received by Local Authorities but Pillar 2 data also needed to be made available. It was anticipated that there would be movement on this issue at a national level soon. In terms of the latest Pillar 1 data for Middlesbrough, the number of positive Covid-19 tests was currently less than 5 per day. There was a risk that the public may not engage fully in testing and the R-rate was notoriously difficult to calculate. It was also the case that the smaller the area the less use the R-rate would be.

A Member of the Board queried what mechanisms the Local Authority could put in place to ensure anyone advised that they had come into contact with someone who had tested positive for Covid-19 would self-isolate for 14 days. The Chief Executive advised that the whole system was based on compliance and there was a need to shift social norms. Previously national campaigns to use seat belts, picks up dog poo had been very successful and a campaign was being launched by the Council to encourage people to self-isolate and to 'Do it for Boro'. Middlesbrough Football Club had also been engaged and free face masks with the branding had been produced to help sell the message. In addition 50 temperature guns had been purchased, which would be used as a promotional tool to assess whether individuals may need to be tested. There was a need to broker conversations with people and encourage everyone across the town to protect their loved ones. The Council's Communications Team would be undertaking further work from next week in respect of this aspect.

A number of the Board Members expressed their gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Chief Executive and all of the staff working across the Council for the tremendous amount of work that has been undertaken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The response from officers had been over and above requirements and expectations. Members advised that if they could offer any further support please let them know.

Reference was made to the Prime Minister's announcement that Track and Trace would be operational by 1 June. The point was made that clearly this had not been the case as the first meeting of the delivery board was not scheduled until the end of this week, two weeks after the government stated the system would be operational - keeping in mind that Middlesbrough was one of the beacon areas for the development of a Local Outbreak Plan. It was queried as to when a fully functioning track and trace system would be in operation in Middlesbrough? And thus far how many tests had been undertaken and how much tracing activity, if any, had taken place? The Chief Executive advised that tests were being undertaken, however, the data was not flowing through to the Council effectively enough to develop Local Outbreak Plans, which were due to be in situ by the end of June.

A Member of the Board queried whether the Local Authority had expected the Track and Trace system to operate in this way or if it had been a departure from original expectations in terms of how it was to be delivered? It was also queried as whether now that responsibility for Local Outbreak Plans had been devolved to the Local Authority with uncertainty surrounding the funding, powers to deal with local spikes, connectivity for any app and wider public engagement, the Council could be blamed for any failures devolved to it? The Chief Executive advised that he had personally not envisaged this level of autonomy and emphasised that Middlesbrough Council would do the best it could for its residents. In terms of financial allocations Middlesbrough had received a really good allocation compared with neighbouring authorities. The Council would also take whatever action was required to contain the spread of the virus.

Reference was made to the reopening of schools and whether parents could be satisfied that all of the precautionary measures that needed to be taken were in place. The Chief Executive advised that generic advice had been provided to all schools across the town and a huge amount of work had been undertaken. The Council was keen to ensure that as many children as possible returned to school.

A Member of the Board advised that they also wished to place on record their thanks to the Chief Executive and staff across the Council for all the excellent work that had been undertaken in respect of the response to Covid-19.

In terms of any possible local outbreaks it was queried as to what public engagement was to be undertaken to remind the public of the seriousness of Covid-19. The Chief Executive advised that as part of the engagement work in respect of the Local Outbreak Plan another leaflet drop was planned. The leaflets would emphasise the importance of personal hygiene and social distancing and the need to take Covid-19 as seriously as people did when it first emerged. Partners had been involved in this work and material would start to be published early next week.

Concerns were raised in respect of the reopening of bars and restaurants from 4 July 2020 and the potential impact this would have on the spread of the virus. The Chief Executive advised that the Local Authority was exploring how if cafes and pubs were required to serve outside this could be used as an opportunity to engage people in conversation and undertake temperature checks. Similarly with schools and shopping centres it would be about shifting the social norms in terms of people's behaviour.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and the very informative presentation provided.

AGREED that the content of the presentation be noted.

The Executive Member for Environment was in attendance to update the Board on his aim and aspirations, progress made to date and to highlight any emerging issues relating to his portfolio.

The Executive Member for Environment made reference to the following elements:-

- A Green Strategy was currently being developed to ensure the town became net carbon neutral.
- Work was ongoing to improve conditions with Middlesbrough's roads.
- 30,000 square meters of wildflower planting was planned.
- A disposal strategy was being brought forward for 2025.
- An urban farm development was under consideration.
- The department was currently dealing with the issue of recovery.

Following the presentation, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions and the following issues were raised:-

A Member of the Board made reference to an item on the Executive Forward Work Programme entitled Future Waste Disposal Arrangements. It was queried whether clarification could be provided in respect of what would be considered as part of this report, what the major challenges were and whether the Executive was committed to keeping the refuse collection service in-house. The Executive Member for Environment advised that the Council would be keeping refuse collection in-house and the report was concerned with the disposal of waste post 2025 and not the collection of waste.

In response to a query in respect of pothole repairs the Executive Member for Environment advised that the pothole repair plan had originally been scheduled to commence in April 2020 but obviously there had been a delay owing to the recent lockdown. However, double squad teams had been employed and the programme was now due to commence on a ward by ward basis next week, with the aim of purging each ward week by week (alphabetically). A set procedure had been established to ensure consistency and the aim was to get it right first time.

Reference was made to the issue of fly tipping and it was acknowledged that often local Councillors are best placed to highlight in their wards the known hotspots for fly tipping. In response to a query in relation to enforcement it was advised that the Council does pursue legal action where possible and a number of people were due to be taken to court in respect of fly across the town.

In terms of wildflower planting it was queried whether any such schemes were in place and the Executive Member for Environment confirmed that they were plans and should any Members have any areas they thought suitable to get in touch.

A Member of the Board made reference to the Council's Tree Policy and queried whether the Council was considering at any stage modifying its response to the very high trees in certain areas of the town, as there had been a number of issues. The Executive Member for Environment advised that if ward Members had real concerns about specific trees in their wards to contact him directly and action would be taken.

A Member of the Board queried the evidence base for the Mayor's assertion that closing local parks 'saved lives?' It was also queried as to when the parks reopened what was the scientific evidence base for that decision? What change had occurred in public health terms that made reopening the parks desirable at that point? In response the Executive Member for Environment stated that the decision to close the parks had been the Mayor's decision and any specific questions in relation to that decision would need to be directed to the Mayor.

It was queried as whether there was a clear and agreed process for delivering key public health messages to the public, as a lot of the message had been complex in respect of the reopening arrangements. The Executive Member for Environment acknowledged that there had been issues in respect of communication but again that was an issue that would need to

be raised directly with the Mayor.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

6 COVID-19 RECOVERY: ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Executive Member for Environment and the Director of Environment and Community Services were in attendance to provide OSB with an update regarding the department's COVID-19 recovery plans.

The Director of Environment and Community Services advised that from 1 June 2020 all of the department's staff were back at work and services were certainly very quickly returning to normal. Bereavement services had fully introduced the restrictions in respect of cremation and funeral services in line with national requirements. Significant issues were anticipated in respect of home to school transport if the current 2m social distancing requirements remained in September, as it would not be possible to transport the same number of children. Significant levels of cleaning had been undertaken and although the bus station was not yet fully opened the necessary preparations had been made.

In terms of Environmental Services the Green Waste collection service was operating on a monthly basis, junk jobs remained suspended until a time when they could be picked up in a safe way and the pest control team was not currently undertaking any home visits. The vast majority of other services were back up and running.

A Member of the Board queried what arrangements for social distancing were in place for the refuse collectors while they were travelling from one area to another? It was explained that there was usually a team of three and the driver would leave the depot on his own prior to arriving in the ward where the other two guys would join the vehicle. All vehicles were regularly cleansed and sanitized.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

7 SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE

The Scrutiny Chair's in attendance provided an update in respect of the work undertaken by their respective panels since the last meeting of the Board.